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MÖRĀN ETHŌ

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THE THEOLOGY OF DIVINE NAMES IN THE GENUINE WORKS OF EPHREM

Thomas Koonammakkal



ST EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SEERI)
Baker Hill, Kottayam, 686001
Kerala, India

2015

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Koonammakkal

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St. Benet's Hall

THE THEOLOGY OF DIVINE NAMES IN THE GENUINE WORKS OF EPHREM

(Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford)

The Divine names is a much repeated theme in Ephrem (c.306-373), but the few scholarly studies on the subject have been confined only to certain selected divine names and titles. Accordingly, a general thematic study based on the most important texts is the scope of the present thesis; attention is also drawn to the underlying theological polemics involved.

After a general introduction, dealing briefly with biography, the problem of authenticity, method and scope, I proceed to the first part of the study: Ephrem's quasi philosophical rationale for a God-talk which introduces his theology of divine names. In two chapters I examine the main Ephremic texts and a few Syriac sources to clarify his exploitation of the term *peḥtā* and his method of 'never forgetting the ontological chasm', which will have a crucial bearing on his theory of divine names.

In the second part, consisting of chapters 3-6 and an appendix, the theme of God's descent into human language, - the core of Ephrem's theology of divine names, is studied. As in the first part, selected texts are translated and analyzed. Recurring concepts such as *šmā*, *kunnāyā*, *qnōmā*, *qenyānē*, *galyātā*, *kasyātā*, are explained and applied to interpret Ephrem's views on divine descent to our side of the chasm. In the appendix I deal with an apparent apologia of Ephrem.

The consistency and logic of Ephrem's theological world provide a significant undercurrent that will emerge from this study. Also, though this is not a comparative study, the parallels with the Cappadocian Fathers as regards Neo-Arian polemics call for further research on Neo-Arianism taking Ephrem into account.

God crossed the ontological chasm in a progressive, threefold revelation: God creates, God speaks and God puts on humanity. Incarnation of God is central to the theology of divine names. So Nature, Scripture and the Incarnate Son warrant our God-talk, provided we do not forget the ontological chasm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to Bishop Pallikaparampil Mar Joseph (eparchy of Palai) for the opportunities and encouragement he has given me to pursue my Patristic and Syriac studies in Rome and in Oxford; to my great grand uncle Rt Revd *Malpan* George M. Puthenpura, Rt Revd Dr Joseph Mattam, Rt Revd Dr Archimandrite George Mifsud and Revd Michael Angel OCD for their constant help in my studies; especially to *Malpan Malpane* Dr Sebastian P. Brock - Patriarch of Syriac Studies - my *Guru* and guide for his patient and friendly discussions on innumerable occasions, valuable corrections, encouraging suggestions, and some bibliographical materials which would have otherwise escaped my attention. It was his cordial welcome and support that brought me to Oxford. The wonderful hospitality of Mrs. Helen Brock on many occasions has reminded me of *Gurukula*, the ancient educational system of India and I am grateful to her; to Dom Edmund Beck OSB (+12th June 1991), who, in spite of his deteriorating health and illness, cheerfully welcomed me in 1988, 1989 and 1990, and kindly answered my many queries on Ephrem. It was a great inspiration to listen to a scholar whose intellectual immortality has already created a pre-Beck and post-Beck era in the study of Ephrem. My meetings with that *Lector Unius Libri* at Metten remain an electrifying influence and unforgettable experience. Without his first critical edition,

translation, monographs and articles many like me would not have encountered the real Ephrem.

As I reached the IVth chapter consultation of an unpublished thesis became necessary and I am grateful to Revd Dr Robert Murray and Dr Luk van Rompay in this regard. Thanks for Dr Alison Salvesen and Dr Robert Murray for the doctoral examination. I thank the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (Rome), and the Institute of Missiology Missio (Aachen) for part-financing my studies, and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom for an ORS award for three years. My sincere thanks are due to St Benet's Hall and Abbey of Ampleforth and especially to Dom Philip Holdsworth; to the trustees of the House of Saints Gregory and Macrina; to the University of Oxford, to library staff of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Theology Faculty, Bodleian and Ashmolean for their constant and friendly assistance; to Agnes and Alois Gschwendtner, Josef Schmatz, Prof. Jakob Speigl, Emma Hartmann, Fr V.C. Lucas, Rainer Gebauer (+2001) with Hilde and Marie Trassl, Manfred Prechtel, Lizbeth Völkl, Stefan Buchmüller and Eugenie for their cordial and generous hospitality during my summer holidays.

I wanted to write a second volume to complete this work so that Ephrem's theology of revelation, redemption - theosis and Church - could be brought to light. My already published articles based on this research are enlisted in the bibliography which has been slightly updated. Parkinsonism since 2004 altered my original plan for a second volume. Some ten years ago Robert Murray insisted to publish it as it is. But the final and the decisive reason for this volume is the insistence of Dr Mary Hansbury whose scholarly studies on

Isaac of Niniveh, Jacob of Serugh, John Dalyatha and the early Syriac Christian literature are well known. She took initiative to share the financial burden along with her friends for the present book. I thank her and her colleagues for this generous hand. She procured a microfilm through The British Library and made a digital copy for me and wrote an excellent foreword. May Ephrem the Harp of the Holy Spirit and Isaac the Great help her with their prayers in abundance! Fr. Lorenzo of Udhanashram, Fr. Swoby and K.V. Thomas (Office Secretary of SEERI) helped me a lot to recover, repair and publish this. Thanks to Revd Dr Jacob Thekeparampil for publishing it from SEERI; to the staff of WiGi Printers for their service.

With profound gratitude I remember Revd Dr Placid J. Podipara (+1985), Dom Jean Gribomont (+1986) my 'mentor of Patristics', Dom Edmund Beck (+1991) and dedicate this work to my parents and teachers.

Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar
(Beth Aprem Nazrani Dayra)

9th June 2015

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ephrem's works and some others attributed to him

CDiat	Commentary on Diatessaron
CEx	Commentary on Exodus
CGen	Commentary on Genesis
CNis	Carmina Nisibena
Epiph(?)	Hymns on Epiphany
HcH	Hymns against Heresies
HcJ	Hymns against Julian
HdA	Hymns on the Unleavened Bread
HdAK(?)	Hymns on Abraham Kidunaya
HdC	Hymns on the Crucifixion
HdE	Hymns on the Church
HdF	Hymns on Faith
HdI	Hymns on Fasting
HdJS(?)	Hymns on Julian Saba
HdN	Hymns on the Nativity
HdP	Hymns on Paradise
HdR	Hymns on the Resurrection
HdV	Hymns on Virginity
HiA	Hymns in Armenian
LP	Letter to Publius
Pr Ref	Prose Refutations
SdDN	Discourse on Our Lord
SdF	Discourses on Faith
SNic	Discourses on Nicomedia

Other works cited or referred to

AMS	Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum, ed., P. Bedjan, (repr. Hildesheim 1968)
BKP	Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie
BKV	Bibliothek der Kirchenväter
BPM	Biblia Polyglotta Matritensia
BUSE	Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint Esprit, Kaslik
BZWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
CBM	Chester Beatty Monographs
CBOTS	Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series
CDT	A Catholic Dictionary of Theology, ed., J.H.Crehan, (London 1967)
CJA	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity
CS	Cristianesimo nella Storia
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CWS	The Classics of Western Spirituality
Dem	Demonstrations of Aphrahat (ed. Parisot)
DHGE	Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques
DIP	Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione
DPAC	Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane
DSp	Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique

EB	Eichstätter Beiträge
ECR	Eastern Churches Review
ETL	Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses
GOFI	Göttinger Orientforschungen I. Reihe:Syriaca
HA	Handes Amsorya
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
JAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LM	Le Muséon
MBT	Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie
NPNF	A Select Library of Nicene and Post- Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, (repr. Grand Rapids)
NT	Novum Testamentum
OC	Oriens Christianus
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
OKS	Ostkirchliche Studien
OS	L'Orient Syrien, (Paris 1956-67)
PBR	The Patristic and Byzantine Review
PdO	Parole de l'Orient
PG	J.P.Migne, Patrologia Graeca
PL	Placid Lectures, Rome
PMS	Patristic Monograph Series
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PS	Patrologia Syriaca, (Paris 1893-1926)
RAC	Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum
REG	Revue des Études Grecques
RHE	Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique

RTL	Revue théologique de Louvain
SA	Studia Anselmiana
SC	Sources Chretiennes
SCS	The Syrian Churches Series, Kottayam
SEA	Studia Ephemeridis 'Augustinianum'
SK	Schriften der Kirchenväter
SNT	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
SP	Studia Patristica
SSN	Studia Semitica Neederlandica
SSS	Studies Supplementary to Sobornost
ST	Studi e Testi
SVC	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed., G. Kittel, (Grand Rapids 1964-1976)
Thes Syr	Thesaurus Syriacus, ed., R. Payne Smith, (repr. Hildesheim 1981)
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopädie
TTHGS	Translated Texts for Historians, Greek Series, Liverpool
TTS	Tübinger Theologische Studien
Vig Chr	Vigiliae Christianae
VS	Verba Seniorum
ZKG	Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

General

Arm	Armenian
art	article
c	circa
ch	chapter
esp	especially
lit	literally
n	note
nn	notes
ns	new series
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
re	refrain
repr	reprint
serm	Sermon
ss	second series
Subs	Subsidia
Syr	Scriptores Syri
trans	translation
v	verse



FOREWORD

In the introduction to this monograph, the author dutifully lists some of the scholars in the past who have criticized Ephrem's writings. And yet today many in the West appreciate this simpler approach to Christianity as opposed to a doctrinal one. Ephrem uses poetry primarily as a vehicle for his theology. And since poetry tends not to encapsulate truth, Ephrem is able to present a dynamic approach and does not use Western philosophy but rather images from the Bible, human experience and the natural world.

This present volume may well be the first monograph of Ephrem's theology in the English language. And the author has focused on a very important aspect: divinization or *theosis* as the goal envisaged in the process of divine revelation and incarnation; 'the glorious name of Jesus being

the hidden bridge leading humanity from death to life' (HdF 6:17). The first author to note the importance of divine names was I. Hausherr.¹ But it was Robert Murray who focused the attention of scholarship on divine names. In his discussion of Ephrem's theory of names, he says it would actually require a book in itself. And in his *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, he includes an appendix with all the names and titles of Christ in Ephrem and in other early Syriac writers. Elsewhere he interprets Ephrem in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* I.25 as assuring that "God incarnate bears the personal name 'Jesus', leading to true access to the transcendent, incomprehensible and infinite Godhead itself," which Murray considers to be "an early formulation of the doctrine of analogy." He says in some respects it anticipates the symbolic theology of the Iconodule Fathers and classical Byzantine iconographical theory.² This is an astonishing insight which was further developed by Sebastian Brock in his own reflections on divine names and divinization, and *theosis*.³ This is the perspective carried forward in the present work that the theology of names is basic to Ephrem's thought and is very much part of his *theosis*.

The name Jesus is understood in the context of salvation history and the mystery of incarnation. By giving meaning to all other names it remains identical with the Name "with us is God." This is the mixing of God with human beings, exchanging the mantle of names. So Christ is called 'the garment of our Glory', which restores all creation.... Thus members of the

¹ I. Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et Voies d'Oraison*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 157 (Rome, 1960).

² R. Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," *Parole de l'Orient* VI-VII (1975-76).

³ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 148-54.

Church are restored creation whose names are mixed with Christ's – which takes us to the core of Ephrem's theology of divine names. (p.266)

According to Koonammakkal the self-revelation of God is complete only in the divinization of humanity, or *theosis*. He became one of us through the incarnation of names and 'ultimately and really through the incarnation of the Son'.

But God's proper names are beyond mixture because his nature is beyond mixture. This is the same as saying that there is no other God: there is an ontological chasm between what is God and what He is not. Here God's proper names are God Himself, manifestations of God's *qnômâ*. The *kyânâ* of God is beyond sharing and mixture because there is one and only one God. The *kyânâ* remains with God as regards proper names even when these names are shared with us. Divinization of human beings does not mean that human beings will share God's *kyânâ*. (p.192)

One finds here a close study of over fifty hymns of Ephrem, several of which are entirely dedicated to his theory of names. Koonammakkal basically considers Ephrem's use of 'ontological chasm' and his theology of names. He describes the concept of chasm (*peḥtâ*) based on a scriptural insight (Luke 16.26), but alludes to Ephrem's possible awareness of this phenomenon in other traditions such as in Manichaeism. And he reminds readers 'that chasm (*peḥtâ*) is only a corollary of the Semitic concept of God being absolutely unique rather than indicating a spatial divide'. Then he takes us along the Way (*ûrḥâ*) that Ephrem outlines in the many hymns included here. Nature, Scripture and the Incarnation are the actual Way itself, with the prophets as

milestones and the apostles as inns. Then out of the very dilemma of the chasm, previously described with its inability to cross over, comes a description of Ephrem's genius in depicting a divine pedagogy unfolding in our language, where titles and names of God become the bridges; and also how names teach about God and also how to invoke Him.

His names urge you how and what you should call Him.
One name taught you that He is; another that he is the
Creator.

He showed you that He is also the Good;
He made clear to you that He is the Just too.
Again he is and called the Father.
The Scriptures have become the crucible... (HdF 44.1)

The Names do not develop from human language but out of Scripture. The only access to the Threefold Names of the Father, the Son and the Spirit is through Scripture. One may not go beyond the Names to scrutinize the Natures as "Their nature is hidden" (HdF 59.5). This may simply be an anti-Arian caution but it may also say something about the Names themselves in Ephrem's theory of names "as the invocation of their names is in fact the revelation of 'Their natures'." The power (*ḥaylâ*) of a name is revealed in and through the name and is active wherever the name is present or invoked.

In another important distinction, in discussing God's becoming incarnate in human language, the author stresses that it is a revelation by means of our speech, rather than a case of God's language being given to us. God is as it were an artist who has depicted hidden realities (*kasyâtâ*) on

revealed ones (*galyâtâ*).⁴ Divine names are *galyâtâ* and the underlying natures, *kasyâtâ*. With this stress on creation, Ephrem avoids any hint of pantheism or emanation.

One of the final chapters of this work discusses the relation of divine names to baptism which further indicates how Ephrem's theories are not esoteric but orthodox and grounded in an ecclesial experience. The Church through the sacraments is the means of sanctification. The name (*mešhâ*) is a mystery (*râzâ*) and shadow (*tellâlâ*) of the name *Mšîhâ* (HdV 4). Here Ephrem identifies the baptismal oil and Christ whose name is being put on by those who receive baptism. That name (*Mšîhâ*) is transmitted to them because of their baptism and so they are called *Mšîhâyê*.

Koonammakkal considers his own work to be just the beginning. Building on this fine foundation one might hope that the rabbinic traditions which surrounded Ephrem might be carefully scrutinized.⁵ In some cases one may find where both Ephrem and the rabbis took from prior Greek sources but perhaps it could be enlightening to view how they may have developed these influences differently. In the end it may be said that such was Ephrem's genius, that he defied any systematization in developing his theory of names and transcended all influence.

One final aspect of Koonammakkal's work is his reflection on the "garment of names" in Ephrem. Commenting on HdF 31 he says: "the incarnation is only the

⁴ See the important research of G. Noujaim in his unpublished thesis. And see his "Anthropologie et économique," PdO 9 (1979/80).

⁵ For example see P. Schaefer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, (Albany, NN: SUNY, 1992). He discusses divine names in rabbinic traditions.

climax of divine speech and the ultimate means of divine communication and dialogue with us and in and through our language.” By bringing together the anthropomorphic language of the OT and the human experiences of Jesus, Ephrem seems to allude to the idea of the bodily incarnation of God as the continuation and culmination of God’s incarnation into human language.”

And here Koonammakkal mentions the research of J. Neusner who has examined the Jewish experience from 70CE to 600, reflecting on the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash, rather than on esoteric materials. He quotes Neusner: “that the Judaism of the dual Torah resorted to incarnation of God...that the incarnation of God formed part of the unfolding of the inner logic of that Judaism, as it does of any Judaic system spun out of the heritage of the Hebrew Scriptures” (p.202). This stunning conclusion merits further research even in regard to Ephrem. In his study, among the various comparisons of God with humanity “in our image and likeness,” Neusner opens and concludes with the following quote:

Said R. Hoshiah, “When the Holy One, blessed be he came to create the first man, the ministering angels mistook him for God, since man was in God’s image, and wanted to say before him, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.’ ...What did the Holy One, blessed be he, do? He put him to sleep so that everyone knew he was a mere man. (*Genesis Rabbah* VIII:X)

There is a growing interest in *theosis*. N. Russell's research gives the evidence in the Greek Patristic tradition.⁶ And in an Appendix he includes evidence from the Syriac tradition. Some have interpreted *theosis* as being from Hellenic influence on Syriac Christianity. But Ephrem most likely did not know much Greek; rather one sees Semitic and Biblical concepts influencing his theology. Yet Ephrem's work is part of a long tradition of patterns of *theosis* and divinization. Before Ephrem, it occurs in the Odes of Solomon. Subsequent to Ephrem: Macarian Homilies; John the Solitary; Philoxenus; Babai; Isho'yab II; Sahdona; Isaac the Syrian; Stephen bar Sudhaili and John of Dalyatha. This present research of Koonammakkal really goes to the heart of *theosis* and what it actually means. This will have an enriching impact on the study of *theosis* in these other Syriac writers as well, giving as it were the biblical foundation. The study of *theosis* includes not only personal sanctification and divinization but also harmony between humanity and the natural world. The original harmony intended between God and creation may now be understood in terms of divinization as well: with *theosis*, one's salvation is connected to the salvation of the cosmos.⁷

As noted by Koonammakkal, the iconic or sacramental character of Ephrem's language about Nature and Scripture allow him to speak beyond his time, place and culture. Quite possibly now that *theosis*, in the context of Eastern Christianity, is being examined as an alternative to Western

⁶ N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ See Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence*, (New York: Amity House, 1987).

Christianity in China,⁸ this study of divine names, the root of *theosis*, will give a stronger foundation to that research. And of course in India there is an extended, on-going examination of *advaita* or non-duality in the Hindu context. *Theosis*, as it is explored in this monograph will be important, especially as it puts divine names on a biblical foundation. And although inter-religious dialogue is not the competency of this monograph, for those involved in inter-religious dialogue, a better perspective on the discussion of *advaita* in Hinduism will be possible as a result of this research. According to some interpreters, the process of inculturation is not peripheral or optional for the Church, nor perhaps for scholarship. Collins suggests that the shape of inculturation is Christ taking form in culture and in that process transforming it.⁹ And he discusses *theosis* in the context of inculturation. Now since Latin West, Greek East and Syriac Orient are interconnected, discoveries in the Syriac Oriental tradition may influence the other traditions. And perhaps a certain synthesis within Syriac Christianity may only be obtained in its expression in India because of the inter-religious dialogue which occurs here. But this synthesis would benefit the universal Church.

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⁸ A. Chow, *Theosis: Sino-Christian theology and the second Chinese enlightenment: heaven and humanity in unity*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁹ Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India*, (Hampshire UK/Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007).

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Some sixty years ago a Russian theologian and well-known patristic scholar wrote about Ephrem: “He is least significant as a thinker ... The most important of Ephrem’s writings which have come down to us are his commentaries on the Bible ... Ephrem’s writings contain many outstanding images, but few original ideas”¹. Most of the original works of Ephrem seem to have been unknown to Florovsky. Burkitt, indeed one of the greatest Syriac scholars of the first half of our century, made an even more pathetic description: ‘What has given S. Ephraim his magnificent reputation is hard to

¹ G. Florovsky, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, (Vol VII, The Collected Works, Vaduz 1987), pp. 268.274. After dealing with the Cappadocian Fathers in great detail, in just seven and half pages Florovsky dismissed Ephrem with some illinformed comments typical of the first half of this century. But in a 1987 English translation of it one expects at least a footnote on Florovsky’s chapter on Ephrem. One wonders how and why he included Ephrem at all in such a casual and unscholarly manner. Evidently it reflects the amateur attitude of many scholars in Latin and Greek traditions as they speak of Syriac Christianity. For them Christianity is either Latin West or Greek East. Unfortunately they neglect the fact that both Latin and Greek are Western wings of Christianity and both of them developed inside the Roman Empire. Historically the Eastern branch is the Christian Aramaic or Syriac version of Christianity. It is true that in the fourth century the Christianity of Roman Empire began to develop a Latin (Western) and a Greek (Eastern) version far away from the Semitic (though Hellenized) Mesopotamian Persian version. Gradually the original Eastern Christianity was sidelined by the Western versions. It is really unfortunate that Syriac Christianity is often seen as an appendix and not as the original, common and mainstream version.

say ... (Ephrem's) works are excessively voluminous and well preserved. But it is a weary task, gleaning the grains of wheat among the chaff. Ephraim is extraordinarily prolix, he repeats himself again and again, and for all the immense mass of material there seems very little to take hold of. His style is as allusive and unnatural as if the thought was really deep and subtle, and yet when the thought is unravelled it is generally commonplace ... (Ephrem's poetry is) not ... beautiful or inspiring ... judged by any canons that we apply to religious literature, it is poor stuff ... , it shows a lamentable standard of public taste ... (Ephrem's theology) is out of touch with reality; it gives us neither the historical Christ, nor the Christianity of the Early Church, nor yet the clearly defined doctrines of post-Nicene times"². Most of Burkitt's comments would fit very well with Assemani's six volume edition he used, rather than with the real Ephrem. Anyone who looks for 'clearly defined doctrines', in Ephrem will be frustrated. Only two decades ago Segal wrote: "As a writer Ephraim was exceptionally prolific ... Ephraim was acquainted with the work of Greek philosophers, but possibly little with that of Greek theologians ... Of Syriac style, however, he was a master, and he earned eulogies that were bestowed on him in his own day and shortly afterwards - Prophet of the Syrians, Lion of Syria, Harp of the Holy Spirit, Pillar of the Church. His work, it must be confessed, shows little profundity or originality of thought, and his metaphors are laboured. His poems are turgid, humourless, and repetitive ... But Ephraim's writings reflect his courage, his sincerity, his unswerving zeal for the faith and his

² F.C. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London 1904), pp.95-96, 99, 109-110. Burkitt's scathing criticism is too long to be cited here fully. I remember Brock double-checking this peculiar and shocking opinion of Burkitt before allowing me to include it in my draft in 1989.

sympathy for the poor. He knew well the lives and thoughts of the ordinary man.”³

It is true that Ephrem repeats himself. But if one thing is true about Ephrem’s poetry, it is that it has occasionally a penetrating sense of humour and depth of thought. His repetitions are pedagogical and are meant for his ordinary and average readers. So the opinions mentioned above are not taken at their face value by Syriac and patristic scholars today,⁴ especially after the first critical edition of most (if not all) of Ephrem’s available authentic works by the tireless efforts of Dom Edmund Beck (+1991). Mitchell, Leloir, Tonneau and Brock edited the other available authentic works. There is an increasing interest among Syriac and patristic scholars in Ephrem’s works, fostered very much by Beck’s edition, translation, monographs and articles. Without consulting Beck’s critical edition a serious study of Ephrem is almost impossible. The number of dissertations and studies on Ephrem during the past three decades provides ample proof. Almost a quarter of a century ago Murray did not hesitate to call Ephrem, “the greatest poet of the patristic age and, perhaps, the only ‘theologian-poet’ to rank beside Dante”,⁵ a view supported by Tugwell who described

³ J.B. Segal, *Edessa, ‘The Blessed City’*, (Oxford 1970), p.89. In a letter dated 19th February 1991, Segal informs that he still has no reason to change his view on Ephrem’s poetry. All the same he admits that he is not in touch with recent studies on Ephrem. For his positive comment on Ephrem the “scientist”, see below Chapter V n 60. See my “Ephrem’s Theology of Humour”, *SP* 41 (2006), pp.51-56.

⁴ S. Brock, “The Poetic Artistry of St Ephrem: An Analysis of H. Azym. III”, *PdO* 6/7 (1975/76), pp. 21-28

⁵ R. Murray, “Ephrem Syrus”, *CDT* (London 1967), p.222. In 1988 Murray told me: “Why are you after Ephrem? Already scholars have written all what can be written about him. You cannot write anything new or original on Ephrem. Better you write on Aphrahat”. I did not reveal to him that it was one of his footnotes that led me to my

Ephrem as “one of the great religious poets of the world”.⁶ There is no doubt that this new interest will continue in the decades to come, demonstrating that Ephrem is one of the greatest poet-theologians Christianity has ever produced. In this general introduction⁷ I shall deal with the following three topics: a short biographical sketch, authentic works, and the scope and method of this study.

dissertation. In 1991 (June 20) Murray was happy to be my doctoral examiner. After the doctoral defence he advised me personally: “Thomas, please wait for my comments and remarks in view of publishing your work”. In 2004 (IXth Symposium Syriacum, Kaslik) he asked me: “Thomas, why didn’t you publish your work?” As I reminded him about his advice he said: “Oh No! It is perfectly honourable that you publish the work as it is”. Another reason for the delay was my waiting for a ‘third opinion’ which I did not get (though I had the pleasant surprise to listen to the results of my own research in 2006 at Ligugé, only to find later that it was already a published article with a reference to my work).

⁶ S. Tugwell, *Prayer: Keeping Company with God, 1* (Dublin 1974), p.138. A view repeated in his *Prayer: Keeping Company with God, 2* (Dublin 1974), p.147.

⁷ For a brief introduction and bibliography on Ephrem, see A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, (Bonn 1922; repr. Berlin 1968), pp.31-53; I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, (2ed. Rome 1965), pp.56-83; E. Beck, D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, J. Kirchmeyer, “Ephrem le Syrien”, *DSp* 4 (1960), 788-822; E. Beck, “Éphrem Syrus”, *RAC* 5 (1962), 520-531; L.Leloir, “Éphrem le Syrien”, *DHGE* 15 (1962), 590-597; R.Murray, “Ephrem Syrus”, *CDT* 2 (1967), 220-223; idem, “Ephrem Syrus”, *TRE* 9 (1982), 755-762; F.Rilliet, “Efrem Siro”, *DPAC* 1 (1983), 1103-1107; A.de Halleux, “Saint Éphrem le Syrien”, *RTL* 14 (1983), 328-355. Further comprehensive bibliography can be seen in, C. Moss, *Catalogue of Syriac Printed Books and Related Literature in the British Museum*, (London 1962), pp.331- 352. On more recent works, see M.P. Roncaglia, “Essai de bibliographie sur saint Éphrem”, *PdO* 4 (1973), pp.343-370; S. Khalil, “Compléments de bibliographie éphrémienne”, *PdO* 4 (1973), pp.371-391; S.P. Brock, *Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1960-1990)*, (Kaslik 1996) pp 78-94; idem, *Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1991-2010)*, (Kaslik 2014), pp.145-173; K.den Biesen, *Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* (Grove in Umbria 2002).



Handwritten musical notation in a medieval script, consisting of several staves with notes and clefs.



Handwritten musical notation in a medieval script, consisting of several staves with notes and clefs.



EPHREM: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Some apparently autobiographical remarks which we can glean from Ephrem's authentic works are more important than the contradictory and unhistorical details provided by later biographies⁸ which were written to satisfy the public who began to be more and more fascinated by the popularity of his works. They wanted to know more about the saintly semi-ascetic genius behind those works and there was very scanty information about his real life in Nisibis and Edessa. To glorify the early days of Ephrem his biographers invented the story that his father was a pagan priest. Monks wanted to see him as a monk; so he was un-historically associated with travel in the Egyptian desert to meet monks. They were only patronizing his ascetical and spiritual legacy. Later iconographic representation of Ephrem in an exclusively monastic setting⁹ as a dry personality is only a fiction. But there is a mid tenth century icon¹⁰ that depicts him a little more realistically: a small, rather stout, bald-headed,

⁸ For studies, see D.O. Rousseau, "La rencontre de saint Ephrem et de saint Basile", *OS* 2 (1957), pp.261-284; *OS* 3 (1958), pp.73-90; B. Outtier, "Saint Éphrem d'après ses biographies et ses oeuvres", *PdO* 4:1-2 (1973), pp.11-33. This is an excellent study on the evolution of seemingly biographical materials. A typically contrasting approach to the same sources can be found in A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient II*, (CSCO 197 Subs 17, Louvain 1960), pp.70-110.

⁹ See K. Weitzmann et al., *The Icon* (London 1987), p.320; J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques a peintures conservés dans le Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient: Contribution a l'étude de l'iconographie des églises de langue syriaque* (Paris 1964) I, pp.237-241; II, plate 61. W. Braunfels, *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie IV: Ikonographie der Heiligen* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1974), 151-153.

¹⁰ See K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons, I: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton 1976), pp.94-98; plates 36,113,115. A modern reconstruction based on the oldest available icon (AD 944-950) of Ephrem is given above with some additional Syriac inscriptions.

humorous, almost smiling figure with a very short beard! The painter tried his best to cover the baldness by combing the hair from both sides of the head, a rather interesting and rare feature. In all other iconographic traditions about Ephrem a short beard is a regular feature. Apart from the fact that he stands along with Basil, there is not much in the way of anachronistic elements in it. But the monastic figures of Paul of Thebes and Antony the Great are on the opposite side. One clear picture that emerges from the genuine works of Ephrem is that he was not an extreme ascetic; he is full of wit, humour and personal warmth. His social encounter with ordinary life is undeniable. His concern for and touch with everyday life and problems encountered by fellow Christians and others is clear to his readers. He is not at all aloof from the time and the world around him.

One significant criterion of authenticity for his works is the absence of excessive humility, and the reverse is true of the spurious works under his name. The 'orthodox' wanted to make him a champion of Nicene doctrine and hence he is said to have gone to the Council of Nicaea in 325, along with Jacob of Nisibis. Though Jacob knew the qualities of Ephrem the young man who grew up under his spiritual and theological guidance, it is not self evident that every Episcopal participant in the Council of Nicaea came there like Alexander of Alexandria who had genuine reasons to take Athanasius with him. More than that Ephrem was not at all important or famous enough to be there at that time. Later historians were overawed by his fame and they thought his presence at Nicaea a real boon for Nicene theological orthodoxy. His fame in the later Syriac and Greek world was so great that he is said to have visited Basil of Caesarea, and as he knew no Greek a miracle occurred so that both of them could communicate without an interpreter. This kind of Greek

chauvinism patronizing Ephrem to capitalize upon the fame and name of Syriac Ephrem will even ordain deacon Ephrem again into a deacon and Greek Basil has to do this! The childhood vision of Ephrem about the vine shoot from his tongue can be explained in the light of the popularity of his works. A large number of spurious works crept into the Ephremic corpus while many of his genuine works were adapted for liturgical use, often in abridged form, whereas others were lost.

Ephrem was born in or near Nisibis, probably about the year 306, from Christian parents:¹¹ “I was born in the Way of Truth; although my childhood did not know (it), as I became aware I obtained it in the furnace”. The Way of Truth is evidently Christianity. Brock thinks here ‘furnace’¹² is an allusion to baptism.¹³ About this we are told again: “Your truth (was already there) at my youth; (your truth) (remained) towards my old age”¹⁴. We can assume from these two texts that, as Ephrem grew aware (that is, by catechetical instruction) of the ‘truth’ in which he was born, he accepted baptism. But why is he silent about his

¹¹ See E. Beck, *Ephräm der Syrer: Lobgesang aus der Wüste*, (Freiburg im Breisgau 1967), p.18; L.Leloir, *Doctrines et méthodes de S. Éphrem d'après son Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant*, (CSCO 220 Subs 18, Louvain 1961), p.54; S. Brock, *Saint Ephrem: Hymns on Paradise*, (Crestwood 1990), pp.8-9. But Vööbus is more reserved about Ephrem's father being a Christian. A.Vööbus, *Literary Critical and Historical Studies in Ephraim the Syrian*, (Stockholm 1958), pp.23, 46-47; idem, *History of Asceticism II*, p.84.

¹² *HcH* 26:10. See Beck's note in *CSCO 170 Syr 77*, p.98 nn 14-15; idem, *Lobgesang aus der Wüste*, pp.17-18. In *HcH* 3:13 we have an allusion to Ephrem's catechumenate and baptism. But one cannot agree with Beck when he says that it hints at an adult baptism. The scene of adult baptism is only an inference from the usual practice of the day. What if Ephrem is an orphan child (of martyr parents) entrusted to the protection and care of ascetic Jacob of Nisibis? In his particular case catechumenate could have started at an early age in order to join the *qyāmā* at baptism in boyhood.

¹³ S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p.9 n 2; idem, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, (SCS 9, Kottayam 1979), pp.11-14, 135.

¹⁴ *HdV* 37:10. See *Thes Syr II*, 1918-1921.

parents unless he had lost them before he came to know them? Most probably, as a boy¹⁵ he became a *bar qyāmā* at his baptism after a period of catechetical instruction under the saintly bishop Jacob of Nisibis (308-338).¹⁶ Along with Jacob, his successors Babu (c.338-350), Walgash (c.350-361) and Abraham (c.361 onwards)¹⁷ are remembered with personal gratitude and warmth by Ephrem.¹⁸ During the time of bishop Walgash Ephrem had become a well known teacher in Nisibis.¹⁹ According to Barhadbeshabba of Halwan (second half of sixth century) Ephrem's teaching career began after AD 325. When Jacob of Nisibis returned after attending the council of Nicaea he appointed Ephrem as *mpašqana* (biblical exegete of the catechetical school).²⁰ In

¹⁵ In *HdE* 30:20 Ephrem offers a prayer so that his hymns may serve before God like Samuel. This comparison between his hymns and Samuel may indicate a reflection of Ephrem's own childhood and joining the catechumenate at a very early age. His pious mother might have entrusted her little boy to Jacob the ascetic. Such an indication we find also in biographical stories.

¹⁶ *CNis* 16:16-19. Here both Ephrem and the city of Nisibis are identified. But a careful reading reveals boy Ephrem's catechumenate under Jacob.

¹⁷ J.M.Fiey, "Les évêques de Nisibe au temps de saint Éphrem", *PdO* 4 (1973), pp.123-135; I.Ortiz de Urbina, "L'évêques et son rôle d'après saint Éphrem", *PdO* 4 (1973), pp.137-146.

¹⁸ *CNis* 13-21. The city of Nisibis is speaking in the first person; but there are some cases when it is Ephrem who speaks. It is as if both Nisibis and Ephrem grew up as little children under the strict discipline of Jacob.

¹⁹ E. Beck, *Lobgesang*, pp.19-20.

²⁰ A. Scher, *Mar Barhadbeshabba Arbaya: Cause de la fondation des Écoles* (PO 4, Paris 1907; Turnhout 1971), pp.63, 377. If this assertion, as well as the generally held view about his year of birth as c.306 is historically tenable, Ephrem was only c.19 years old when he became *mpašqana*. This can be another indication about Ephrem's upbringing in an exemplary Christian atmosphere from a very early age as in the case of Origen who was only 18 when he became head of the catechetical school of Alexandria in 203.

338, 346 and 350 the city of Nisibis was besieged²¹ by the invading Persian army of Shapur II (309-379); and in 358 the war broke out again. As an inhabitant of Nisibis during all these battles, Ephrem speaks of much misery and deprivation. But each time the Persians failed to conquer the city.

In 363 the Emperor Julian's invasion of Persia failed and he was killed. But Jovian had to give over the city of Nisibis to the Persians as a result of the peace treaty. This was a tragic blow to the Christians of Nisibis; most of them had to desert the city as refugees because of this new political situation under the Persians. Ephrem is said to have stayed a few months in Amid.²² But in 363/4, as a refugee,²³ he went to Edessa and his fame soon began to spread into the Greek world. Edessa was the hotbed of the different sects such as Marcionites, Bardaisanites, Manichaeans, Neo-Arians and countless smaller and less known groups. So, Ephrem's arrival in Edessa would be a great blessing for the smaller 'orthodox' group denigrated as Palutians by their heterodox counterparts. The next decade saw the most creative period of Ephrem's literary output. In all probability he took over the already existing 'school',²⁴ and his students and disciples began to abound. This 'school' is responsible for the rapid spread of Ephrem's reputation far and wide into the Graeco-Latin west. Ephrem's books became the text-books of the school for nearly a century.

²¹ Theodoret, *Eccl Hist*, 2: 31.

²² A.Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, pp.87-88.

²³ A.Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, pp.87-88; S.N.C. Lieu, *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic*, (Liverpool 1986), pp.96-99.

²⁴ A. Scher, *Barhadbesabba: Cause de la fondation des Écoles*, p.381; see A.Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (CSCO 266 Subs 26, Louvain 1965), pp.7-9.

Nothing suggests that he became a ‘monk’ in Edessa, though he knew some ‘monks’ there.²⁵ What Beck concedes is only a very distant possibility of some short occasional withdrawal of Ephrem into solitude in the desert, though such retreats are extremely unlikely.²⁶ But so far as the evidence goes, Ephrem remained a *bar qyāmā*, though Vööbus held a different view.²⁷ His original works to some extent indicate that he was a deacon both in Nisibis and in Edessa.²⁸ Towards the end of his life, during a famine, he organized some relief work to help the sick and dying in Edessa, a work befitting a deacon in those days. According to the *Chronicle of Edessa* (written in the mid-sixth century) he died on 9th June 373.

Ephrem knew what was going on in the Greek Christian world, though most probably he did not know Greek.²⁹ His lack of any ‘debt’ to Greek philosophy was emphasized by Murray: “Unlike Bardaisan, Ephrem probably knew no Greek, shows no debt to Greek philosophy, and expresses contempt for Greek thought”.³⁰ But on the basis of

²⁵ See E. Beck, “Ein Beitrag zur Terminologie des ältesten syrischen Mönchtums”, *SA* 38 (1956), pp.254-267; idem, “Asketentum und Mönchtum bei Ephraem”, *Il Monachesimo Orientale*, (OCA 153, Rome 1958), pp.341-362; idem, “Ascétisme et monachisme chez saint Ephrem”, *OS* 3 (1958), pp.273-298.

²⁶ E. Beck, “Ephrem Syrus”, *RAC* 5 (1962), 523-524; idem, *Lobgesang*, pp.21-22. But such a personal spiritual luxury suits only a man aloof from the common man and community at large. The picture of Ephrem in his genuine works does not support such a monastic luxury! It is true that at least towards the last decade of his life Ephrem came across Egyptian style monks even in and around Nisibis/Edessa.

²⁷ A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, pp.92-110. Vööbus draws on many spurious and later sources; idem, *History of Asceticism* III, pp.27-50.

²⁸ *HcH* 56:10-11; *CNis* 14:1; etc. see Beck, *CSCO* 170 Syr 77, p.192 n 12; idem, *CSCO* 219 Syr 93, p.43 n 1.

²⁹ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem* (Placid Lectures 6, Rome 1985), p.5.

³⁰ R. Murray, “Ephrem Syrus”, *CDT* 2 (1967), 221; the same view also in his *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac*

some of the later studies of Beck, Murray seems to have modified his view when he writes: “in his last years Ephrem must have overcome his aversion to philosophy and done some serious homework”.³¹ About the apparent ‘contempt’ on the part of Ephrem towards ‘Greek thought’ one has to remember that he was polemicizing against heretical sects who (at least in Ephrem’s view) made use of Greek philosophy in their theological deliberations. Ephrem is giving vent to his feelings towards heretics rather than to Greek philosophy as such. In one of his last prose works he would even defend Greek philosophy against Bardaisan!³² Bardaisan and the Arians in general knew Greek language and thought very much better than Ephrem; and so Ephrem can naturally boast of not having imbibed there from, and this seems to be what he actually does on one occasion.³³ What

Tradition, (Cambridge reprint 1977), p.31.

³¹ R. Murray, “The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity”, *East of Byzantium : Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed., N.G. Garsoian et al., (Dumbarton Oaks Papers 1980, Washington 1982), p.9.

³² See Appendix. In order to draw attention to the extent of Greek philosophical influence on Ephrem’s world I read a communication in 1992. But today we have a doctoral dissertation on this issue. See T. Koonammakkal, “St Ephrem and ‘Greek Wisdom’”, R. Lavenant, ed., VI Symposium Syriacum 1992 (OCA 247, Roma 1994), pp.169-176. See U. Possekkel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, (CSCO 580, Subs 102, Louvain 1999). The interval between his various works in Nisibis and Edessa cannot be ascertained and hence the difficulty in explaining this apparent change of attitude. On the other hand if we suppose that Ephrem wrote for two kinds of audience/readers, we can easily explain this. It is true that he lived in a Hellenized world and drew on from it. But what pre-Ephremic textual evidence of Greek philosophy in translation is available in Syriac language? Possekkel does not point out any such textual evidence. Ephrem’s expertise in Greek literature is questionable though he had some indirect access to the Greek world because of his multi-cultural (Semitic, Persian, Hellenized, etc) background. Otherwise Murray’s idea of later homework by Ephrem in Edessa seems to be the reasonable solution.

³³ See below Chapter II n 43.

he denies is any classical Greek education and not his familiarity with Greek concepts. No doubt he came into direct contact with many bilingual Christians in Edessa; moreover it is almost certain that in the 'school' at Edessa he had to reply to his students from this bilingual background. But his command of Greek is doubtful though he was familiar with commonplace Hellenistic ideas.

Epiphanius in 375 (*Haer.* 51.22,7), Jerome in 392 (*De Viris Illus*), Palladius in his *Lausiac History* in 419/20, Sozomen c.439 (*Eccl. Hist.* III.16;IV.34), Theodoret c.449/50 (*Eccl. Hist.* II.30;IV.29) and Gennadius towards the end of the fifth century (*De Viris Illus.* ch. 3; ch.67) have something to say about Ephrem. The supposed biographical details keep on increasing through out the centuries. The Syriac life, written at least after 525³⁴ (abounding in unhistorical details full of anachronisms such as the visits to Bishoi and Basil), does not offer us reliable biographical data. So too the *Testament* and the Greek lives are of no historical value. Ephrem's association with any Egyptian-style organized monasticism is unhistorical.³⁵ Jacob of Serugh (+521), in a panegyric, mentions Ephrem's special liturgical role as choir master(?) teaching *bnāth qyāmā* his new songs in the Church, calling him 'a second Moses', 'an eagle among the doves' and comparing him to a watchdog of the flock.³⁶ Such a biographical sketch is closer to what we know from Ephrem's genuine works.

³⁴ S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp.20-21; P. Bedjan, *AMS* 3, (Paris, Leipzig 1892; repr. Hildesheim 1968), pp.621-665.

³⁵ S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp.25-33, 25 nn 16-17.

³⁶ P. Bedjan, *AMS* 3, pp.665-679. This imagery is based on Ephrem's polemics against heretical sects. See *HcH* 52:2, 53:5-7. *CDiat* 12:13.

GENUINE WORKS OF EPHREM AND THE PROBLEM OF THE EPHREMIC CORPUS

Many of his poetic works were assimilated into the liturgical texts of Syriac Churches and the task of distinguishing his original ideas or hymns is almost impossible as far the liturgical traditions are concerned. But Beck's critical edition has already established the texts of almost all known or available works of Ephrem. The task of sifting out the liturgical traditions, real translations, abridged or emended translations, works from the 'school' of Ephrem, Ephremic ideas or citations preserved in later authors, spurious works, etc., is a very complex problem which awaits the attention of patristic scholars.³⁷ Here we can easily sidestep this whole problem since I base this study only on the established texts available through the critical edition.³⁸

Ephrem's authentic works can be classified into following categories: Poetical works (both *madrāshe* and *mēmre*), semi-poetic artistic-prose, and other prose works

³⁷ Beck's introductions in the *CSCO* editions and version give details about mss traditions, problem of authenticity, etc. See E. Beck, "Éphrem le syrien" *DSp* 4 (1960), 788-800; Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem grec et latin", *DSp* 4 (1960), 800-819; J. Kirchmeyer, "Autres versions d'Éphrem", *DSp* 4 (1960), 819-822; S. Khalil, "L'Éphrem arabe, état de travaux", *Symposium Syriacum 1976* (OCA 205, Rome 1978), pp.229-249. A.de Halleux, "La transmission des hymnes d'Éphrem d'après le ms.Sinai Syr 10,f. 165v178v", *Symposium Syriacum 1972* (OCA 197, Rome 1974), pp.21-63; idem, "Un clé pour les hymnes d'Éphrem dans le ms. Sinai Syr 10", *LM* 85 (1972), pp.171-199; B. Outtier, "Contribution à l'étude de la préhistoire des collections d'hymnes d'Ephrem" *PdO* 6/7 (1975/76), pp.49-61; J. Melki, "Saint Ephrem: un bilan de l'édition critique", *PdO* 11 (1983), pp.3-88.

³⁸ For previous editions, see S.P. Brock, "A brief guide to the main editions and translations of the works of St Ephrem", *The Harp* 3:1-2 (1990), pp.7-29.

consisting of polemical treatises and biblical commentaries. Poetical works are grouped into various hymn (*madrāshe*) cycles:³⁹ *HdF* (87), *CNis* (77), *HcH* (56), *HdV* (52), *HdE* (52), *HdN* (28), *HdP* (15), *HdI* (10), *HdA* (21), *HdC* (9), *HdR* (5), *HcJ* (4/5), *HiA* (51). The most important semi-poetic artistic prose work is *SdDN*. A similar semi-poetic prose treatise is *LP*. There are various cycles of metrical homilies (*mēmre*) under Ephrem's name; but except those of *SdF* (6) and *SNic* (16) there is little which we can mention without considerable doubt about authenticity. The polemical prose works are *Pr Ref*. Ephrem's extant exegetical works include *CGen*, *CEx* (not complete), *OT Catenae*, *CDiat* (incomplete Syriac original and a complete Armenian version),⁴⁰ *CActs* and *CPaul* (only in Armenian translation). Occasionally even Ephrem's prose works are semi-poetic or highly rhetorical. Of the three other works - *HdAK*, *HdJS* and the *Sermon on the Sinful Woman* - which we treat as Ephrem (?), the former two are non-Ephremic and the last is of uncertain authenticity according to Beck.

³⁹ There is no universally accepted way of abbreviating their titles; hence this easy and short list, some of which are already set by other scholars. In brackets I give the number of hymns in each cycle.

⁴⁰ Beck has raised serious doubts about the integrity of the text of *CDiat*. See E. Beck, "Der syrische Diatessaronkommentar zu Jo.I.1-5", *OC* 67 (1983), pp.1-31; idem, "Der syrische Diatessaronkommentar zu der unvergebbaren Sünde wider den Heiligen Geist", *OC* 73 (1989), pp.1-37; (Beck had a few more unfinished articles to be published on this complex question, which he published later). See L. Leloir, "Divergences entre l'original syriaque et la version arménienne du commentaire d'Éphrem sur le Diatessaron", *Melanges Eugene Tisserant III:1*, (ST 232, Citta del Vaticano 1964), pp.303-331; P. Yousif, "Les formes littéraires du commentaire du Diatessaron de saint Éphrem de Nisibe", *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (OCA 229, Rome 1987), pp. 83-92; W.L. Petersen, "Some remarks on the integrity of Ephrem's Commentary on Diatessaron", *SP* 20 (1989), pp.197-202.

METHOD AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

The present work is based entirely on the critical text as established by Beck and other scholars. For a thematic study like this consulting the manuscripts will not materially alter the course of research and the conclusions reached. In order to gain a comprehensive picture of Ephrem's theology on divine names I have made an extensive selection of texts which often contain some repetitions, something which is characteristic of our poet-theologian. After translating, I have often attempted an exegesis of Ephrem's text in order to reach his pattern of thinking. I believe that such a commentary, rather than a mere translation can help make the poet's thought clearer. Beck's German translations served as a guiding factor in some cases where the text or the meaning is not clear. But occasionally I have taken a side-step. The translation has been kept as literal as possible, but whenever such a rendering fails to express the thought of Ephrem a more liberal approach is followed.

I do not attempt harmonize his texts in presenting Ephrem's theology of divine names; all what I try to do is to bring together his scattered thoughts on the subject and to explain some of his texts with the help of similar texts by him. At times one can very easily read things in to imagery of his, which has been half explained, or taken for granted. It is precisely here that I have applied a more exegetical approach. Ephrem was not a systematic or academic writer. Many of his concepts, phraseology, and above all, the poetic images and illustrations call for an interpretative method. Some of his terms are purposely left un-translated, as choosing one particular meaning may seem to exclude some nuance of the original or imply an imposition of later meanings. He is

primarily a poet who handles theological topics for two kinds of audience or readers at the same time. He wrote most of his important hymn cycles to counter the propaganda of various heretical sects; naturally one can expect a lot of repetitions to drive home certain theological themes into a non-élite audience or readers. But to be effective he had to deal with the subtle arguments of comparatively better-educated propagandists. So he takes for granted a lot of concepts and images which could make sense to his élite contemporaries. He is not very keen to elaborate the thoughts of his adversaries in every detail, as he was mainly theologizing for ordinary people confused by too many sectarian propagandists. Many of his prose works were meant for the same purpose, but with a special emphasis as ‘school’ books for his students who were an élite when compared with the general public. Though he was a teacher in the schools of both Nisibis and Edessa his real school was his contemporary Syriac speaking Church at large.

Ephrem’s thinking is not shaped by any kind of systematic or classical education. So there is a particular and personal way in which he introduces his thought into his descriptive poetic language. This method often defies systematic, philosophical approaches. His appeal is primarily to the logic of the heart. He may use ordinary words with an unusual twist of meaning, adding a word play or some other nuance. If he had been systematically trained to set out his thoughts we would not have the Ephrem we have. All the tireless repetitions, originality of thought, natural passion in arguments, inborn sense of humour occasionally directed at himself as well as at his theological adversaries, his childlike wonder at everything in nature, etc; above all his interest in and observation of the natural and animal and vegetative

world around him, and an extra ordinary insight into human psychology, make him a different kind of theologian in the fourth century. Had all his compositions survived a better picture of his theological world would have reached us.

The thesis is divided into two sections of unequal length, apart from the general introduction and conclusion. Chapters I and II form the first part, dealing with the concept of the 'ontological chasm' – Ephrem's own quasi-philosophical rationale and introduction to the theology of divine names. In chapter I, selected texts will be translated and studied to clarify how he developed this idea mainly from a scriptural source. Chapter II consists of a further selection of texts - translated and analyzed whenever necessary to elucidate and illustrate Ephrem's theological method – 'never forgetting the ontological chasm' - which will have a crucial bearing on his theology of divine names. Both chapters end with special conclusions leading us to the next part.

Part II consists mainly of chapters III-VI which deal with the theme of God's descent into human language, which is the core of Ephrem's theology of divine names. This section forms a unit, and the chapter divisions are only for practical reasons. All these chapters consist of selected texts - translated and analyzed - which deal with his theory of divine names and titles. All important texts dealing with this theme are selected for study; but the selection of texts is only representative, and not comprehensive since the latter would fall well beyond the scope of the present study. A complete theory on divine names evolving from these texts will clarify the main trends of Ephrem's theological thought. The Syriac terms are given in simple transliteration which any student of Syriac could easily identify. Recurring terms and themes

such as *šmā*, *kunnāyā*, *qnōmā*, *qenyānē*, *galyātā*, *kasyātā*, etc. will be explained and applied to interpret Ephrem's theology of divine names. Repeatedly one is able to show how the concepts of 'ontological chasm', *galyātā*, *kasyātā* and 'borrowed names and proper names' are fundamental in Ephrem's polemics. The consistency and logic of Ephrem's system of thought provide another significant undercurrent that will emerge from our study.

Towards the end of Part II I give an appendix based on a prose work which Ephrem wrote with some apologetic purpose. Since this prose work stands apart in many ways from the texts I deal with in chapters III-VI, it is treated briefly and only as an appendix.⁴¹ Then there is a general summary which will provide conclusions based on our study. A list of the abbreviations used is given at the beginning, and a selected updated bibliography at the end. Some of the articles or books which appear in the footnotes⁴² are excluded from the bibliography on the ground that they are too secondary, too general or well known to everyone. Except for a few additional sentences the doctoral dissertation remains as it is. Bibliography has been slightly updated to include some recent studies on Ephrem and his theology.

⁴¹ I am very happy to note that this text and similar prose texts gave rise to a doctoral research. See U. Possekel, *op.cit.* n 32 above.

⁴² Only the first occurrence will give the full title; in all subsequent cases an abridged title is used after the name of the author, editor or translator.

PART I

**EPHREM'S CONCEPT OF ONTOLOGICAL
CHASM**

**INTRODUCING HIS THEOLOGY OF
DIVINE NAMES**

INTRODUCTION

EPHREM'S SEARCH FOR A LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

Talking about God has always been a problem faced by all theologians, though they vary in their approach. The fourth-century theologian-poet Ephrem was aware of the radical importance of this question in theological discussions: How can we speak about something which is beyond all human faculties of perception - physical and intellectual? What language should we use, and with how much certainty? When the contemporary Arians took too rationalistic an approach and tried to explain the Son's generation 'in time', Ephrem noticed the radically wrong methodology employed by 'the investigators' (Arians) who 'pry into' divine realities.¹ In the name of investigation they simply 'scrutinize' and destroy the very concept of God. He was not against any legitimate search and theologizing; but he strongly opposed 'prying into' the Godhead since this is just impossible because of the ontological difference between Creator and created.

Ephrem was not upholding faith against reason since his category of thought did not involve an opposition between them. For him it is a measured or balanced intellectual investigation that matters, though his emphasis is

¹ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem*, (PL 6, Rome 1985), pp.10-14. Ephrem's polemic is against 'scrutinizers' ('Late-Arianism' in general and 'Neo Arianism' in particular).

always against blunt rationalization.² Choosing poetry as his typical vehicle for theologizing had its advantages.³ He was not bound by the precision of prose, and even in using poetry, he exercised great freedom in his theological language, - employing paradox,⁴ metaphors, symbols, types, parallelism and contrast.⁵

The scope of the first part of this study is to point out Ephrem's own *raison d'être* for the use of divine names and titles in his theological language. Why did he use hundreds of different divine titles with such an astonishing frequency?⁶ The answer lies in the concept of an ontological chasm⁷ - the very quasi-philosophical corner-stone in the system of Ephrem's theological thought. He had to establish his own philosophy of language in his theologizing, in order to over-

² See S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.15; P. Yousif, "Approach to the divine realities in the thought of Saint Ephrem of Nisibis", *The Church I Love: A Tribute to Rev. Placid J. Podipara*, J. Madey, G. Kaniarakath, ed., (Kottayam n.d.[c.1983], pp.54-69.

³ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.11; idem, "The Poet as theologian: St Ephrem", *Studies in Syriac Spirituality* (SCS 13, [Kottayam] 1988), pp.53-61, repr. from *Sobornost* 7:4 (1977), pp. 243-250; idem, *The Harp of the Spirit* (SSS 4; 2nd ed.1983), pp. 9-17.

⁴ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p. 11; E. Beck, "Die zwei Paradoxa des Glaubens bei Ephräm", *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, R.H. Fischer, ed., (Chicago 1977), pp.169-175.

⁵ R. Murray, *Symbols*, passim; idem, "The theory of symbolism in St Ephrem's theology", *PdO* 6/7 (1975/76), pp.1-20. In this excellent article Murray mentions the contributions of Beck, Leloir, Bravo, Hausherr, Brock, Graffin and Saber who have studied selected aspects of Ephrem's many-sided method. One may add the names of Yousif, Hidal and Botha to this list.

⁶ Fascinated by a footnote in Murray's *Symbols* (p. 166 n 7) I collected almost all divine titles and attributes used by Ephrem as the preliminary part of my research. Immediately I noticed Ephrem's reason behind his profuse use of divine names which led me to this work.

⁷ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.10-14.

come the obstacle provided by any 'systematic' language about God. In doing this, he was going far beyond his contemporary theologians and he proves to be a sort of religious philosopher and genius in his own right.

Ephrem's arrival in Edessa as a refugee - in or after 363 - offered him a chance to encounter Arian propaganda. Ephrem's aversion to Greek philosophy - whatever the extent of this apparent drawback - did not affect his sharp arguments against Arian propagandists.⁸ With a biblical simplicity of theological method he encountered their views with great zeal, skill, intuition and pragmatism which he did not just acquire anew in his Edessan period; instead he was building on his own already articulated way of thinking. It is almost certain that Ephrem had already at hand a coherent method or approach about how to use language in theology even in his Nisibean period. But it is also true that it was during his Edessan period that he provided the most extensive and systematic exposition of his own philosophy concerning the difficulties facing anyone attempting to speak about God.

Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith* are thought to have been written in Edessa with the above-mentioned purpose in mind. It is a climax and compendium of Ephrem's former approaches towards formulating his own typical philosophy of talking about God without trying to 'define' God. The

⁸ *HdF* 1:3, 6:1, 13:1, 35:3, 39:2-4, 40:1ff, 46:3-4, 51:7, 9, 53:2, 59:1-2, 60:4, 62:2-6, 10, 64:10-11, 77:1ff, 78:1ff, etc. See E. Beck, *Die Theologie des hl. Ephraem in seinen Hymnen über den Glauben* (SA 21, Rome 1949), pp.62-80; idem, *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben: Ihr theologischer Lehrgehalt und ihr geschichtlicher Rahmen* (SA 33, Rome 1953), pp.111-125.

following two chapters concentrate almost exclusively on the *HdF* because this cycle is full of repeated assertions about the impossibility of prying into divine realities.

CHAPTER I

ONTOLOGICAL CHASM: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATED

INTRODUCTION

A GOD BEYOND HUMAN DEFINITION

Theological ‘definitions’ are not to be sought in Ephrem, because in his view they can be ‘potentially dangerous’ and ‘actually blasphemous’.¹ Ephrem was theologizing to counter the rationalistic propaganda of the Arians in Edessa. They put the generation of the Son “on our side of the ontological gap”². Such a concept of divine generation bound by human time, and explainable by human reason, was radically the opposite of everything that Ephrem had to say about God. Do we have a definable God whose outline is fixed by a created intellect? It is against this background that Ephrem began to explore the difficulties of speaking about divine realities in human terms. If human reason is able to ‘grasp’, ‘define’ and bring God down to the level of created things, there is no more any concept of God as Creator. According to Ephrem the Arians come to grief by following a wrong method in theologizing; hence he was not primarily concerned with refuting their doctrines in every detail.

¹ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.10.

² S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.10-11.

Instead, he was pointing out their false premise and the unacceptability of their method in theologizing, thereby discrediting their views. Having rejected their wrong method leading to blasphemous conclusions, it was incumbent upon Ephrem to clarify his own method. But as the starting point for his own theological thinking Ephrem sets out to establish a sort of philosophical rationale based on a particular imagery he took over from *Lk* 16:26. In the present chapter I shall deal with his starting point in theologizing because it is precisely this that leads him to oppose the Arian way of theologizing.

A CHASM BETWEEN: EPHREM'S CONCEPT OF *PEḤTĀ*

There are two important texts in Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith*, which clearly give not only the idea of an ontological chasm between God and human being, but also the word *peḥtā*. Elsewhere in *HdF* he gives repeated elucidations of this concept. These texts can serve as the clearest starting points in our study of Ephrem's language about God.

GREAT IS THE CHASM

HdF 15:3-5³

3

We shall not forget ourselves and plunge headstrong
into our God
Let us measure our intellect, and let us balance our
thought,
And let us know our knowledge: How small it is,
And despicable, to pry into the Knower-of-all.

³ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, p.64.

4

Tell me how you have depicted in your mind
 That birth⁴ which is very far away from your inquiry?
 Do you think that there is just a small range
 In the middle, between you and searching (it)?

5

Seal your mouth with silence! Let not your tongue
dare!
 Know yourself, O 'created', 'made', son of an 'earth-
formed'.⁵

For, the chasm is a great, limitless one,⁶
 Between you and the Son as regards investigation.

The chasm involves two poles: God the Creator and we the created. Anything that is created - the human mind itself - is too small to reach out across the distance that separates it from its Creator. Ephrem calls for caution and silence because of our createdness and its consequences, namely that our nature is unable to track down God. The human intellect is pictured as a hunter, or a painter; it is able to trace or depict everything else except its Creator. The Neo-Arian rationalists minimized the real distance between Godhead and humanity when they placed the Son among created beings. Self-knowledge is difficult enough for human beings; accordingly, it is attempting the impossible when our created mind runs after God. The proper realm of intellectual searching is within the created world, and here it is a worthy pursuit. But what Ephrem opposes, is going beyond the created - forgetting the chasm between Creator and created.

⁴ *yaldā* can be also child.

⁵ Three-fold repetition of the same idea.

⁶ According to Beck: *da-dlā* BC instead of *byt*.

Those who think they are going beyond, in fact are not going anywhere beyond, but they just blaspheme God by trying to make the Creator on a par with the creature. By introducing a sharp contrast between human beings (*baryā*, *‘bīdā*, *breh d-gbīlā*) and God (*bārōyā*, *‘ābōdā*, *gābōlā*) in this text, Ephrem seeks to bring out the ontological chasm which the creature can never cross. *Gbīlā* is none other than Adam.⁷ Adam was only formless clay; like a lump of clay under a potter’s wheel, Adam was given proper shape and name by God. The gulf between the two realities is self-evident to Ephrem’s thought shaped by Scripture. Ultimately it is about the uniqueness, lack of plurality of what we usually and traditionally call God which is beyond comprehension, thought, language and definition.

THERE IS A CHASM BETWEEN

HdF 69: 11-13⁸

11

As regards Godhead, what created (being)
Can trace Him out? For, there is a chasm between him
And the Creator.

⁷ Gen 2:7-8 etc. See *gbl* and its derivatives in *Thes Syr I*, 640-642; W. Strothmann et al., *Konkordanz zur Syrischen Bibel: Die Propheten I*, (Wiesbaden 1984), pp.482-483; The Way International, ed., *The Concordance to the Peshitta Version of the Aramaic New Testament*, (New Knoxville 1985), p.57.

⁸ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.213-214. In *HdF* 44:4 (translated in Chapter III) we find the term *peḥtā*; also in *HdF* 63:12.

12

As regards Godhead, not that He is far away
 From (His) possessions;⁹ for there is love between
 Him
 And the creatures.

13

Towards God, no one has come near
 From among the investigators; for He is indeed close
 To those with discernment.

The difference or distance between Creator and creatures is so great that there is an ontological gap which hinders creatures from hunting down what is beyond. No created reality can venture to reach as far as the Being of God. There is only one way out: God coming down to our level. The chasm exists only from our part. Creatures are God's 'possessions' or belongings, not His Being. Between Being and belonging the gulf is beyond comparison. When we look at God as Being He is far away from us; but as we look at God from another angle that is to say, He being our Creator and we His belongings He is very near to us through infinite love. Createdness and the existence of everything depend upon this love from the part of God. The logical

⁹ See *qna* in *Thes Syr II*, 3651-3656; C.F.Jean, J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des Inscriptions Sémitiques de l' Ouest*, (Leiden 1965), p.260; C.F. Burney, "Christ as *ARXH* of Creation", *JTS* 27 (1925/26), pp.160-177; M. Noth, *Die Israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung*, (BZWANT Dritte Folge Heft 10, Stuttgart 1928), p.172; G. Levi della Vida, "El 'Elyon in Genesis 14:18-20", *JBL* 63 (1944), pp.1-9; P. Humbert, "Qânâ en Hébreu Biblique", *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80.Geburtstag*, W. Baumgartner, et.al. (Tübingen 1950), pp.259-266; C.Westermann, *Genesis 1, Teilband Genesis 1-11*, (BKAT I:1, Neukirchen 1974), pp. 392-395; idem, *Genesis 2, Teilband Genesis 12-36*, (BKAT I:2, Neukirchen 1981), p.243.

reason for the existence of an ontological chasm is clear for Ephrem's mind: the radical difference between God's Being and God's 'possessions' which He created out of love. In stanzas 11 and 12 there is an important contrast between chasm and love. Chasm is associated with created being; but love is associated with Creator. The movement of love is from God and the chasm is due to createdness. A similar contrast can be found in stanza 13, where the nearness of God is only for the discerning; the investigators never come near to God. Here too the initiative, that is, the movement leading to nearness, comes from God.

There is a primary distinction between one who is too curious and is foolish enough to forget this chasm as he tries to track down God, and the one who realizes the bond of love between Creator and created. The divine activity which brought creatures into existence is the lasting sign of God's love. Any curious inquirer who tries to pry into divine reality is actually forgetting this very ground of his existence as a created being. Such an investigation amounts to utter ingratitude and blasphemy. Creation fixes nature; investigation can never fix God's nature. Creatures are as they are. God is as if He is not, as He is beyond categories of human thought. *Alāhūtā* is far above and distant by being the Being - the fixer of nature. God's nearness is understood only by those with discernment (*pārōše*). On the contrary, curious investigators (*bāšōyē*) forget God's relationship of love towards His creature (*brītā*) as His 'possession' (*qenyānā*), and hence fail in their inquiry. God's possessions can never extend as far as God's very Being. Ephrem continues to expound the contrast between 'going near' and 'going astray', in the following stanzas of the same hymn.¹⁰

¹⁰ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.214.

14

With that Holy One, no one who is impure
Has any association; for He is wholly
In the holy ones.

15

To that Knowing One, no cunning one
Comes near; but His love is there
Towards the simple ones.

16

To that (Most) High, no one haughty
Comes near; but His love bent down
Towards the lowly.

17

That (is) God - He cannot be set in limits
By a human (being); all the same He loves
The human beings.

18

That (is) the Creator - He cannot be set in limits
By (beings) which are made, however great
His work is.

The scrutinizers and the discerning stand apart in clear contrast. On the one hand there are those impure, cunning and proud people who presume to limit or define God; on the other hand there are the holy, simple and humble, towards whom God descends. The gulf remains on the one side, though it closes on the other side. God's

descending love removes the distance. But it does not mean that anyone can put God within fixed boundaries. Here we can observe Ephrem's method of theologizing which rules out a defining or limiting approach. Limiting the limitless is a contradiction in terms and it defies even human reason. Thus ultimately Ephrem does not imply an approach that puts down reason against faith. Ephrem's approach is not 'either – or'; instead it is 'both- and'. What he opposes is presumptuous scrutinizing, blasphemous tracking down, putting within limits. As Brock has pointed out, it is precisely here Ephrem stands apart on his own¹¹.

THE CONCEPT OF *PEḤTĀ*: SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND?

Before going further into Ephrem's texts about the ontological chasm it is necessary to explore the primary background of the term *peḥtā*. Where did Ephrem find this term as well as its meaning? As Burkitt and Brock have pointed out,¹² Ephrem depends on *Luke* 16:26 as a starting point. But Ephrem follows a variant reading found in the *Diatessaron*:¹³

*meṭṭol d-peḥtā rabbā ' īt baynayn wa-lkōn wa-lā
menkōn*

meškḥīn l-mētē lwātan w-āplā mennan lwātkōn

¹¹ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.10.

¹² F.C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe II: Introduction and Notes*, (Cambridge 1904), p.136; S.P. Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius", *LM* 89 (1976), pp.267, 269.

¹³ I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Vetus Evangelium Syrorum et exinde excerptum Diatessaron Tatiani*, (BPM 6, Madrid 1967), p.118 = p.257.

Lk 16:22-24.26

b-peḥtā ... mrīm ‘aynawhy wa-ḥzā la-l‘āzar
*The Old Syriac has the following:*¹⁴

w-‘amhēn ‘am hālēn kolhēn hawtā rabbtā sīmā
baynayn wa-lkōn d-‘aylēn dṣābēn d-ne‘brōn mekkā
lwātkōn lā neškḥōn w-āplā d-men tammān ne‘brōn
lwātan

Peshitta gives¹⁵ *hawtā rabbtā* and agrees with *Old Syriac*.

The term *peḥtā* in its plural form occurs in the *Odes of Solomon* (in *Ode* 38.2).¹⁶ Aphrahat follows the reading in the *Diatessaron* twice, and gives the phrase *peḥtā rabbā* thrice in his *Demonstrations*.¹⁷ But Aphrahat does not elaborately exploit the text so as to go far beyond the biblical context; nor does he show any extra interest in the term *peḥtā*. In the commentary of Isho‘dad of Merv¹⁸ both *hawtā rabbtā* and *peḥtā haw rabbā wa-dḥīlā* are found side by side as if to accommodate *Diatessaron* and the *Old Syriac*. Such an attempt at harmonizing the two readings is already known from the *mēmra on the Rich man and Lazarus* by Jacob of

¹⁴ A.S.Lewis, *The Old Syriac Gospels or Evangelion da Mepharreshe*, (London 1910), pp.177-178; see D.L. McConaughy, “A recently discovered folio of the Old Syriac (Syc) text of Luke 16,13-17,1”, *Biblica* 68 (1987), pp.85-88 + plate.

¹⁵ P.E. Pusey et al., *Tetraeuangelium Sanctum*, (Oxford 1901), p.424.

¹⁶ J.H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon*, (Oxford 1973), pp.129,133nn 2-3.

¹⁷ *Dem* XX:9 (*PS* I,1, p.908.14-17); *Dem* XX:12 (*PS* I,1, p.912.16-21).

¹⁸ M.D. Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho‘dad of Merv III*, (*Horae Semiticae* VII, Cambridge 1911, p.65; idem, *op.cit.*, I, (*Horae Semiticae* V, Cambridge 1911), p.188.

Serugh who seems to be dependent on Ephrem's exploitation of the idea of chasm.¹⁹ In this *mēmra* Jacob of Serugh employs the terms *peḥtā* and *hawtā* 8 and 9 times respectively. The impossibility of crossing the chasm after death is stressed in the above-mentioned texts (except perhaps *Odes of Solomon*?) and this is a common view elsewhere.²⁰ In Aphrahat it means the impossibility of doing penance after death. It is interesting to know that apart from a verbal form once,²¹ this term occurs in the Syriac Bible only in a plural form in 4Esd 5:8. So it is necessary to turn back to Ephrem to examine how he understands the concept of *peḥtā* in some selected texts.

According to *HdP* 1:12, the children of light, sitting on the height of Paradise, see the rich on the other side of *peḥtā*.²² As is clear from stanzas 10-11, Ephrem mentions Adam's sin and departure from Paradise - a mountain²³ to a slope;²⁴ but the later generation is going to be carried away to mount Qardu²⁵ in the Ark. Cain went out to dwell in a very low-lying land. But the Sons of God,²⁶ or Sethites, dwelt on a

¹⁹ P. Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis* I, (Paris 1905), pp.364-424.

²⁰ A. Merx, *Die Vier Kanonischen Evangelien nach ihrem ältesten bekannten Texte* II, 2, (Berlin 1905), pp.332-339.

²¹ *Hab* 3:14; see *Thes Syr* II, 3085-3086.

²² *CSCO* 174 *Syr* 78, pp.3-4. *HdP* was written in the Nisibean period, and one of his earliest works we have.

²³ See R. Murray, *Symbols.*, pp.258-259; 306-310.

²⁴ *CGen* in *CSCO* 152 *Syr* 71, p.57; see E. Beck, *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies: Übersetzung und Kommentar*, (SA XXVI, Rome 1951), pp.10-13.

²⁵ *Gen* 8:4 (*Peshitta*); B.Grossfield, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, (*The Aramaic Bible* 6, Edinburgh 1988), pp.56, 57n 1.

²⁶ *Gen* 6:2; see Beck's note, *CSCO* 175 *Syr* 79, p.3n 17; L.R. Wickham, "The sons of God and the daughters of men: Genesis VI 2 in early

higher plane. It is against this background that Ephrem describes the situation of the children of light who - many like Lazarus - sit on the height of Paradise and look across the chasm; they can see the 'rich' on the other side of the chasm. Even Abraham's mercy, which was once extended even to Sodom,²⁷ cannot reach out to the other side of the chasm. In *HdP* 1:13 Ephrem explains further: The *peḥtā* cuts off the bond of love the just had towards the wicked, though the latter be their close relatives.²⁸

In *LP* 4 we have two references to the chasm that separates the just, like Lazarus, from the wicked who correspond to the rich man:²⁹ "The just reply leaves the mouth of the upright one, sent on its way to the wicked like a swift messenger, flying fast-winged above the fearful chasm (*peḥtā dhīlā*) which is set as a boundary between the good and the wicked ... and he is unable to come because of the great impassable chasm (*peḥtā haw rabbā* ...) that separates us, so that no one from you can come to us, and none from us can come to you." *LP* 14 describes the reason why no one can help another after death:³⁰ "... for that deep chasm (*haw peḥtā 'amīqā*), which makes a division between the good and the wicked, did not allow them to succour one another." In *LP* 21 Ephrem comes back to the theme indicated in *HdP* 1: 10-12:³¹ "The sight their eyes see gives them pain, stretching to the boundary of the chasm (*thōmeh d-peḥtā*) and passing quickly over it and flying to the garden of Eden, hovering

Christian exegesis", *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 19 (1974), pp.135-147; see below, Chapter III n 83.

²⁷ *Gen* 18:20-33.

²⁸ *CSCO* 174 *Syr* 78, p.4.

²⁹ S.P. Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius", *LM* 89 (1976), pp.275-276.

³⁰ S.P. Brock, in *LM* 89 (1976), p.286.

³¹ S.P. Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius", p.291.

over God's Paradise, it beholds the blessed resting place, and is envious of the tables of the kingdom...”

In *CNis* 10: 7-8 Ephrem speaks about a chasm in the context of the misery of the Christian community in Nisibis during the battles of 359:³²

And how, indeed, has Your Grace shut up its mercies
And withheld its springs, from the people who cried
out,
That its tongue may be moistened?
But there happened to be a *peḥtā* between them and
their brothers;
Like the rich man who called out, but there was no
one answering
To moisten his tongue.

Here Ephrem is referring to the inability of Christians in the Roman Empire to help the Christians in the Persian Empire. Ever since the conversion of Constantine towards Christianity, the Persian Emperor Shapur II suspected the loyalty and patriotism of Persian Christians. Ephrem's allusion to *Lk* 16:19-31 is clear, and here chasm means an utter inability to go over to the other side. In *HdAK* 14:14 Ephrem (?) is describing the victorious feats of the spiritual athlete Abraham Kidunaya:³³ ‘with your (ascetic) labours you jumped the *peḥtā*, and it made your father Abraham and your brother Lazarus glad over you’. Obviously the author is making reference to *Lk* 16:19-31 in an ascetic context. He finds it easy to jump from the patriarch Abraham and Lazarus

³² *CSCO* 218 *Syr* 92, p.29. In *CNis* 33: 9 (twice), 55:5, 56:13 we have the term *peḥtā*; in *CNis* 52:22 and 67:12 we get the term *hawtā*.

³³ *CSCO* 322 *Syr* 140, p.33. *HdAK* is not Ephremic according to Beck.

to Abraham Kidunaya who stands for both. By name he is related to Abraham; by his life he is related to Lazarus. Abraham is the father of every spiritual athlete who has a brother in Lazarus. What was the chasm which Abraham Kidunaya jumped? We have the answer in the next passage about another ascetic, Julian Saba. In *HdJS* 21:2 Ephrem (?) is dazzled by the victories of Julian Saba:³⁴

The bridge³⁵ of lusts, you have broken down;
The *peḥtā* was great between you and them.

Whether the two texts about the two ascetical figures are from Ephrem or not, we have come across an important clue: a bridge of lusts was broken by Julian Saba and hence there opened up a chasm between Julian and lusts. But who was in need of the bridge broken by Julian? The following text gives the answer. *Serm.II,4:205-206* narrates: The sinful woman was on her way to Jesus; but as she went Satan put up some final arguments to stop her and she retorts:³⁶

From my youth until today
I was a bridge³⁷ to him,³⁸ and he trampled on me.

Thus, Satan was accustomed to use her as a bridge because of her lusts, in order to reach thousands of men, as she now reflects. But Satan is going to lose this bridge since she is about to cut the ground from under his feet. It is true that the

³⁴ *CSCO* 322 *Syr* 140, p.77. This is another non-Ephremic work according to Beck.

³⁵ *gašrā* is negatively associated with *peḥtā*.

³⁶ *CSCO* 311 *Syr* 134, p.83. The authenticity of this work too is not certain according to Beck.

³⁷ See above n 35.

³⁸ For Satan to cross over!

term *peḥtā* does not occur here; but the idea of a bridge of lusts in *HdJS* 21:2 and the chasm created by breaking the bridge are clear indications. Thus we have the images of bridge and chasm in an ascetic context which Ephrem(?) understands with some reference to Lk 16: 19-31. Elsewhere Ephrem has employed the symbol of bridge in a variety of senses.³⁹ The *mēmra* of Jacob of Serugh mentioned above has also the imagery of bridge (or the lack of it) over the chasm.⁴⁰ The various meanings of the term *gašra* in Ephrem have been studied by Beck⁴¹ though he does not explore them in relation to the term *peḥtā*.

EPHREM KNEW MORE ABOUT CHASM AND BRIDGE

How did Ephrem proceed from *Lk* 16:26 to reach his more elaborate concept about *peḥtā*? Since we have come across his view of a bridge over the chasm, this question is significant. Like the term *peḥtā*,⁴² *gašrā* too never occurs in the *Peshitta* OT (?) except once in a verbal form.⁴³ In *Lk* 16:26 *peḥtā* or *hawtā*⁴⁴ is an after-death phenomenon between the ‘rich man’ and Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. In Ephrem’s understanding such an after-death chasm was the result of an apparent gulf between the life-styles of those who

³⁹ *HdF* 5:14, 6:17, 23:15, 58:1, 75:21; *HdP* 5:4-5; *SdF* 5:183; *SdDN* 4:6; etc.

⁴⁰ P. Bedjan, *Homiliae*, pp.401, 402, 403, 417, 423, etc.

⁴¹ E. Beck, “Zwei ephrämische Bilder”, *OC* 71(1987), pp.1-16.

⁴² See above, n 21.

⁴³ *2 Sam* 19:17; see *Thes Syr I*, 795-796; *Supplement to Thes Syr*, p.81.

⁴⁴ *hawtā* too is rarely found in Syriac Bible; *Ps* 69: 2,15. *Lk* 16:26 is the only occurrence in Syriac NT. But without doubt the term has implications of Sheol in OT though it is not always the case. See *Zech* 14:4 (*naḥlā* in *Peshitta*; but *hawtā* in Hebrew); *peḥte* in *4Esr* 5:8 can easily be understood in line with *1Enoch* 21:7.

follow Cain to the low-lying land and those who, living on the higher plane are being carried in the Ark. Here we observe how Ephrem can allude to various biblical passages at the same time for some particular theological motive.

But did Ephrem know about the imagery of *peḥtā* and *gašrā* from elsewhere? One is not without some clear indications from Ephrem himself. While refuting Mani's views about the earths or realms of light and darkness we see the same imagery in a different context. Ephrem vehemently opposes Mani's ideas about an abyss between two diametrically opposed realms being connected as if with a bridge so that particles of light can escape from the bondage of darkness. Phrases like *peḥtā ḥasīnā*, *peḥtā patyā*, *peḥtā d-lā gašrā*, *peḥtā* and twice *peḥtā rabbā* occur in *Pr Ref.*⁴⁵ In the same text we have also a much-repeated use of the term *gašrā*.⁴⁶ Thus it is certain that Ephrem was aware of the use of this imagery in the traditional Manichaean context with which he disagreed. The post-mortem crossing of a bridge is an ancient symbol for the after-life, being commonly found in Zoroastrianism,⁴⁷ Valentinian Gnosticism,⁴⁸ Mandaean

⁴⁵ C.W. Mitchell, *S. Ephrem's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan I*, (London, Oxford 1912), pp.96:6.12.31-32. 44-45. 47, 97:9-10; Eng trans. pp.lxxvi-lxxvii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp.96:17-18. 26. 31. 44-45, .97:6-7.8. 12. 15. 18. 20. 22. 25.29.

⁴⁷ See R.C. Zaehner, *The Teaching of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs*, (London 1956, repr.1975) , pp. 23, 133-134, 136; M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas I* (Chicago 1978), pp.328-331; E.S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*, (Leiden 1959), p.80 n 6.

⁴⁸ This school is noted also for its apophatic approach and theology of names. See G. Quispel, "The Jung Codex and its significance", *The Jung Codex: A Newly Discovered Gnostic Papyrus*, F.L.Cross, ed., (London 1955), pp.37-78; A.H. Armstrong, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, (London 1990), ch xii.

religion,⁴⁹ and in ancient Indian (?) and Chinese mythology. Mani seems to have taken over this imagery from Indo-Iranian religious mythology.⁵⁰ The immediate background against which Ephrem exploited the already popular imagery of chasm and bridge seems to be this: his polemic against Manichaeism ideas of primeval dualism, conflict, mixing of light particles in darkness, and cosmic drama of liberation of light particles by crossing the abyss.⁵¹ But the scriptural text was the real source he would make ample use of.

CONCLUSION

EPHREM MODIFIED THE CONCEPT OF *PEḤTĀ*

In *Lk* 16: 26 *peḥtā* or *hawtā* means a post-mortem inability to cross from Paradise/heaven to the side of the wicked and vice versa. In *Aphrahat* it is about the impossibility of doing penance after death. In other words, conversion - joining the higher plane of the sons of light as Ephrem would put it - must happen in our life on earth. In Zoroastrian and Mandaean religious mythology there is at least an indirect similarity to this idea: The post-mortem crossing is

⁴⁹ E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p.80.

⁵⁰ W. Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols*, (London 1988), pp. 48-49.

⁵¹ See E. Beck, *Ephräms Polemik gegen Mani und Manichäer im Rahmen der zeitgenössischen griechischen Polemik und der des Augustinus*, (*CSCO* 391 Subs 55, Louvain 1978), pp.67-110. Clement of Alexandria borrowed the imagery of 'abyss' from the Valentinian gnostics. Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius and Pseudo-Dionysius preferred the term 'darkness' for the same imagery. See V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, (Crestwood 1985), pp.20-23, 31-43. In these Fathers 'darkness' need not necessarily be a typical gnostic imagery as it can be biblical as well. See 1 Sam 8:12.

already determined in our present life by our deeds. But Ephrem went far beyond these interpretations about crossing the chasm. On the one hand he refuted Mani's dualistic principles and the cosmic drama of the release of light particles crossing to the side of light. On the other hand, after summarily rejecting popular mythologies about a chasm crossing, Ephrem took over the imagery of chasm and bridge to construct his own ideas about the impossibility of creatures to cross to the side of the Creator. It has been already pointed out that Ephrem's starting point is *Lk* 16: 26, a text of which he made ample use in his *Letter to Publius*,⁵² but almost entirely forgot in his *CDiat* XV:12-13 where he refers to *Lk* 16:19-31.⁵³

The ontological chasm is about the difference between Creator and the created. The Creator remains ontologically far apart from the creature. Human intellect can never neglect this fundamental gulf when it searches God. Ephrem postulated this principle against the Arians who were contemporaries, in *HdF* 30:2:⁵⁴ 'across this chasm what is made cannot reach its Maker'. According to Ephrem there is a sharp divide between two kinds of reality without any conflict or dualism. For the Greeks it was body and soul, matter and spirit; but for Ephrem being is either created or Creator. There is no middle ground. Thus, he had no difficulty in placing angels, demons, human beings and the entire universe on one side, and their Creator on the other

⁵² See above nn 29-31.

⁵³ L. Leloir, *Saint Ephrem Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant*, (CBM 8, Dublin 1967), pp.146-153: Ephrem does not even mention *peḥtā* or *hawtā*!

⁵⁴ S. Brock's trans. in, *The Luminous Eye*, p.12.

side.⁵⁵ The Divine Word is on the other side of the chasm as it is not a created reality.⁵⁶ The Arians put it on the side of creatures and hence Ephrem's contention and application of a corrective method in theologizing.

⁵⁵ In his Neo-Arian polemics Gregory of Nyssa mentions a division of reality into 'unextended' (Creator who is above spatio-temporal dimensions) and 'extended' (creatures). The creatures are subdivided into 'intelligible' (angelic) and 'sensible' beings. The realm of 'intelligible' beings remains as a middle ground. See H.U. von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée. Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, (Paris 1942), pp. 1-36; A. M. Mosshammer, "The created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 1,105-113", *El Contra Eunomium I en la Produccion Literaria de Gregorio de Nisa. VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa*, L.F. Mateo-Seco, J.L. Bastero, ed., (Pamplona 1988), pp.353-379; P. Plass, "Transcendent time and eternity in Gregory of Nyssa", *Vig Chr* 34 (1980), pp.180-192. C. Stead, *Substance and Illusion in the Fathers*, (London 1985), ch ix. But Gregory of Nyssa was only elucidating what was already taught by Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. See B. Otis, "Cappadocian thought as a coherent system", *DOP* 12 (1958), pp.96-124.

⁵⁶ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.13.

CHAPTER II

EPHREM'S METHOD WITHOUT FORGETTING THE CHASM

INTRODUCTION

THE WRONG METHOD OF THE ARIANS

Having set forth a rationale of his own in theologizing Ephrem can develop it further by contrasting it with that of the Arians. According to Ephrem the Arians went wrong in their doctrines because they were applying a wrong methodology - 'uqqābā and bṣātā - in their theologizing. They are scrutinizers who attempt at an intellectual hunting of God. Their outright investigation is intellectual blunder since no creature can take the Creator within grasp. 'qab means to take by the heel, to hold back, to follow closely, to trace or seek out,¹ to track down. What Ephrem criticizes is not any reasonable search: "There is intellectual enquiry in the Church, investigating what is revealed: the intellect was not intended to pry into hidden things".² Bṣā is to search into or out, trace out, inquire into, investigate, etc.³ B'ā, too, means more or less the same, but with a lesser emphasis.⁴ In Ephrem's terminology the Arians are bāṣōyē (investigators), dārōšē (disputers), sāprē (scholars, here in a sarcastic sense) and saklē (stupid) who go astray through their wrong and presumptuous approach of tracking down, prying into divine

¹ J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.424.

² S. Brock's trans. of *HdF* 8:9, *The Luminous Eye*, p.13.

³ J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.50.

realities, forgetting the ontological chasm.⁵ But the *pārōšē* (discerning ones) do not have such a dilemma as is faced by disputers; they keep in mind the ultimate difference between Creator and created throughout their search.

GOD IS FAR AWAY, BUT VERY NEAR

Once aware of the ontological chasm, then theologizing is possible, according to Ephrem's stand-point. In the following pages one can observe Ephrem's cautious procedure in theologizing and explaining his method, - at the same time never forgetting the chasm. The far-awayness and great closeness of God, is a much repeated theme in Ephrem whenever he reminds his reader about the ontological chasm. In *HdF* 1:4 he advises his readers to fix their eyes on created sign-posts (*nīšē*) found everywhere in Nature. Through these nearby indications or icons, one can safely search and reach 'that far-away one' (*haw raḥīqā*).⁶ But God's nearness is a reality far beyond our understanding as Ephrem explains in

*SdF II:709-714*⁷

If the creatures depend on Him
How can they be far away from Him?
Far away (is) His nearness;

Near (is) His far-awayness.
He is far away, though very near;
Who is (able) to describe Him?

⁵ See *HdF* 1:9, 13:1, 15:7-8, 16:11, 17:3, 23:2-3, 35:3, 39: 1, 51:7, 53:1ff, 60:4, 77:1ff, etc; E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp.62-80; idem, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.111-116.

⁶ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, p.3.

⁷ *CSCO* 212 Syr 88, p.22.

The Far-away-God is very near in Christ, and the nearby-God is in fact far away in God. This dynamic tension of the incarnation is described in terms of paradox as we read:

*HdV 36:9.3*⁸

He (Christ) is far away and near,
Also, hidden in His manifestation.

*CNis 21:13.5*⁹

Be far away and near!
Blessed is He, who is near while being far away.

*CNis 50:6.2*¹⁰

Though far away, He is very near to us
Through (His) union of love.¹¹

In *LP* 6 Ephrem deals with the nearness of Christ to the Father though there is a distance between the two.¹² But that distance means distinction in spite of union and nearness. In the other cited examples it is, instead, a dynamic and paradoxical tension related to the ontological chasm. This tension, though hinted at here, is dealt with elsewhere as hiddenness and manifestation at the same time.¹³ When He is manifest He is hidden; when He is hidden He is manifest. What we can speak and grasp is only this much. Hiddenness does not exclude manifestation and vice versa, and hence there is always scope for speaking about God - not because we are able to do so, but because He has erected sign-posts

⁸ *CSCO* 223 *Syr* 94, p.132.

⁹ *CSCO* 218 *Syr* 92, p.57.

¹⁰ *CSCO* 240 *Syr* 102, p.68.

¹¹ *bmūzāg ḥubbā*. Language of mixing involves no confusion in Ephrem's view.

¹² See S.P. Brock, in *LM* 89 (1976), pp.278, 298.

¹³ See S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.13-15; G. Noujaim, in *PdO* 9 (1979/80), pp.313-315.

all around us - but always in a human way. There is always something that lies beyond the sign-posts.

The nearness and far-awayness of God cannot be understood in any corporeal, spatial or temporal sense. Even the angels, who carry 'the throne', though they are spiritual beings, are unable to investigate¹⁴ because they too stand on our side of the chasm. In *HdF*4:6 Ephrem adduces the case of angels to show that the human inability to investigate divine reality is not anything typically 'human', nor a drawback arising from our physical nature. In the following stanzas Ephrem goes on to narrate the dilemma of even the angels before the incarnate Son; thus it is not a question of corporeal versus spiritual, for spiritual angels cannot 'search out' even the Son who has put on the body.

EVERYWHERE BUT NOWHERE

HdF 4:7-9¹⁵

7

When angels stand in Your presence,
 With their (songs of) praise,
 They do not know
 Which direction they should look for You.
 They have sought You on high above;
 They saw You in depth below.
 They sought You in heaven;
 They saw You in the abyss.
 They beheld You with Him who is adored;
 They found You within creation.
 They descended to You and gave praise.

¹⁴ *HdF* 4:18. 8-9 = *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, p.16.

¹⁵ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, pp.11-12.

8

When they started to seek
 Your manifestation among creation,
 They did not overtake by running
 To stand firm in searching You.
 As they saw You in the depth (below)
 They saw You on high above.
 As they saw You in the grave
 They saw You in the bridal chamber.
 As they saw You dead
 They saw You as the Life-giver.
 Astounded and stupefied, they gave it up.

9

My Lord! Your symbols (are) everywhere;
 But You are hidden from every place.
 When Your symbol is on high,
 It¹⁶ does not perceive that You are (there).
 When Your symbol is in the depth (below),
 It¹⁷ does not understand who You are.
 When Your symbol is in the sea,
 You are hidden from the (very) sea.
 When Your symbol is on the land,
 It does not know You are (there).
 Blessed are You, O Hidden One who has shone out!

According to Ephrem this angelic dilemma should convince human beings of the foolishness and futility of attempting to track down and limit the Limitless, to see the Unseen, to define the indefinable God - whether incarnate or not. Also, the ontological chasm is not the consequence of our corporeality; instead, it is first and foremost a limitation arising from the very nature of our createdness - a condition

¹⁶ 'the height' - angels - does not grasp the Son('s generation).

¹⁷ 'the depth' - human beings - did not know the Son (incarnate); nor did Satan and Death when Christ was in Sheol.

we share even with angels. The angels too are at a loss if and when they try to grasp what is beyond the grasp of every created reality. We cannot form even a picture of God as He is in our heart.¹⁸ Such an emphasis on the significance of the ontological chasm might be the reason why Beck called Ephrem ‘an agnostic’¹⁹ - a title which cannot be given to Ephrem when we understand Ephrem on his own terms. The inability of creatures to track down the Creator is no failure or drawback in Ephrem’s view about our knowledge of God, seeing that the intellect is not meant for such a task on its own resources, as he explains in:

HdF 4:11²⁰

A Wonder You are in entirety,
 From every side, as we seek You;
 You are near, but far away,
 And who (can) arrive at You?
 Investigation is unable
 (In) it’s stretching out (to) reach You.
 When it stretches itself out to reach You,
 It breaks itself and recedes.
 It²¹ is shorter than Your range.²²
 (But) faith arrives at (You);
 Also, love together with prayer.

¹⁸ See *HdF 4:10.9* = *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.13.

¹⁹ E.Beck, *Die Theologie*, p.25; idem, *Ephräms des Syrers Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre*, (*CSCO 419 Subs 58* Louvain 1980), pp.95-96, 116-147; idem, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre im Bild von Sonne /Feuer. Licht und Wärme*, (*CSCO 425 Subs 62*, Louvain 1981), pp.25, 120. Bundy repeats this view; see D. Bundy, “Language and the knowledge of God in Ephrem Syrus”, *PBR 5:2* (1986), p.100.

²⁰ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.13.

²¹ The ‘stretch’ of intellect for investigation is in a pejorative sense.

²² Remoteness, distance, etc.

The 'stretch' of our intellectual enquiry falls short and fails to reach the distance; but faith, love and prayer are able to reach God. Ephrem's idea of 'the heart' does not exclude mental faculties and hence he does not set reason against faith; such an approach would be foreign to Ephrem's system of thought. When Ephrem criticizes the intellectual scrutiny of God, it is only arrogant rationalism he rules out because such an approach blinds or shortens the reach of 'the eye of our thought';²³ hence his warning:²⁴ "Let us not blind the eye of our thought through scrutiny". God cannot be depicted as He is, even in our thought, much less in our language. But for Ephrem this does not eliminate valid theologizing. The ineffable God can be and should be depicted through *demwān* - images and illustrations. *Dmūtā* - image, likeness - serves as an inexhaustible fountain of knowledge. Illustrations which arise from imagination and intuition help our feeble understanding. What we depict are only examples or pictures of a reality which can be looked at from endless angles. The images (*demwān*) we draw in our 'heart' (intellect included), serve as an adorable icon (*yuqnā*) of God, as we are told in *HdF* 4:10. Here *dmūtā* and *yuqnā* mean much the same as what we mean by 'sacrament'.²⁵ Theological thinking is same as icon painting.

Thus, theologizing is a valid and useful process in Ephrem's view. In fact Ephrem goes on 'describing'

²³ 'Eye of the soul' (*HdF* 5:18), 'eyes of the mind' (*HdF* 53:12); see S.Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp. 52-55; M.Schmidt, "Die Augensymbolik bei Ephräm und Parallelen in der Deutschen Mystik", in idem, ed., *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, (EB 4, Regensburg 1982), pp. 278-301.

²⁴ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, p.65.

²⁵ See E. Beck., "Zur Terminologie von Ephräms Bildtheologie", in M. Schmidt et al., *op.cit.*, pp.239-277.

endlessly because ‘defining’ is forgetting the ontological chasm. This involves endless repetitions in order to help the dull and average mind to grasp something about God. Lost in this process of drawing many pictures, Ephrem often bursts into highly pictorial and eloquent rhetoric that characterizes the breakdown of any restrictive barriers of ordinary words and their usual meaning in order to create a sound theological language of his own. This language is an icon, a sacrament – an opening into a different world. It is new door to a new reality, a newly opened window for our perception. Fixedness of word-meaning just disappears along with the concern about making ‘definitions’. Once words - insufficient as they are - lose their static nature, they are used as pigments by an artist. Colours are used one after another to describe rather than to define; but this is a process without an end when somebody can say ‘This is the final picture of God’. Insufficiency of words does not, and need not, bring the process to a halt. There is a divine pedagogy to guide us in our God-talk. But always our words and our language about God remain incomplete. That is why after every description Ephrem feels the continual incompleteness of the picture he is drawing, as in:

*HdF 6:1-5*²⁶

1

How indeed, can anyone

Lapse from Truth?

For, (like) a mountain Truth is (there),

It is visible even to the blind.

Who is it that is unaware

That the Father has a Son?

²⁶ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.24-26.

Not that out of need He begot Him;
 For, He was not in want that He begot Him.
 Nor did He beget for particular reasons.²⁷
 He Himself - the Father in His love
 Begot the glorious Begotten.

Refrain:

Praise to the womb of Your Father.

2

Into the great might of the Sun
 The eye is too weak to look.
 It abates its intensity;
 It moderates its vehemence;
 Its ray stretching itself out,
 Comes down to the eye.
 Apart from the Begotten of the Hidden One,
 There is no one who has seen the Hidden One;
 For He is too mighty for His creatures.
 Through His Begotten, there became visible
 The Being that is not visible.²⁸

3

In the ray that is from Him, there tempered itself
 His wonderful vehemence.
 Not that He actually became weak;
 For us He became sweet, for He abated Himself for
 us.

We have compared Him to a ray,
 Even though this is not His likeness;²⁹
 For, there is nothing

²⁷ causes, necessity, series of a process, etc.

²⁸ For the Christological significance of this verse, see E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, p.84.

²⁹ *dmūteh*. See above n 25.

With which to depict Him exactly.
 In examples³⁰ He is depicted,
 That according to our ability we may learn about Him
 Through His blessed (means of) help.³¹

4

For, in bread there was consumed
 That strength that is not consumed.
 Again, in wine there was drunk,
 That might that (can)not be drunk up.
 Also, with the oil we (have used for) anointing
 Is the power which cannot be measured.³²
 And just as He tempered Himself for the mouth
 In taste and (the mouth) consumed Him,
 He tempered His appearance itself for the eyes;
 He tempered His might in words,
 So that the ear might listen to Him.

5

Among those conceived, You are the Wonderful;
 Among the begotten, You are the Glorious;
 Among the baptized, You are the Designated;
 Among redeemers, You are the Desirable;
 Among the immolated, You are the Slaughtered;
 Among things tasty, You are the Delicious;
 Among prophets You are mingled;
 Among apostles You are entwined;
 Entirely, my Lord, You are in everything;
 In the depth (below), You are the Buried;
 And in the height, You are the Adorable!

³⁰ *b-dēmawātā*. See above n 25.

³¹ *‘udrānawhy brīkē*. See E. Beck, “Die Eucharistie bei Ephrām”, *OC* 38 (1954), pp.51-52; P. Yousif, *L’Eucharistie chez Saint Éphrem de Nisibe*, pp.225-256, 336-337.

³² or ‘anointed with’. We have a clear reference to Baptism and Eucharist in this stanza.

A LANGUAGE THAT IS DIFFERENT

Ephrem's style reminds one of a mystic or lyric poet trying to overcome the insufficiency of human language - thoughts and words - to describe the indescribable.³³ Language itself is a matter of confusion and contention as it tends to be subjective and inaccurate when it describes even created realities. In theologizing, the thinking process can go as far as the chasm and then everything blurs and the path of human thought ends.³⁴ But there is a different path to gain clarity of vision for the eyes of our thoughts: faith, love and prayer.³⁵ Apparently there is a tint of de-intellectualization in Ephrem's theological language. But any attempt to separate between the theologian and the mystic in Ephrem³⁶ would miss both because such a 'scholastic' approach to the patristic period is inappropriate. This is all the more true of the Syriac theological world of the fourth century. The inability of the created to cross the chasm is fundamental in Ephrem's philosophy of theological language. The proper field of intellectual investigation does not expand beyond the created realm. Intellectual inquiry is possible and legitimate only on our side of the chasm. Incorrectness of methodology

³³ Ineffability of God is a common theme in antiquity. See H.A. Wolfson, "Albinus and Plotinus on divine attributes", *HTR* 45 (1952), pp.115-130; idem, "Negative attributes in the Church Fathers and the gnostic Basilides", *HTR* 50 (1957), pp. 145-156; A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, (London 1979), chs 23-24; idem, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, (London 1990), chs 3, 7, 15; J.W. Whittaker, *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, (London 1984), chs 9-10.

³⁴ *HdF* 4: 12.

³⁵ *HdF* 4:11; see above n 20.

³⁶ J. Padinjarekutt, "The present day relevance of St. Ephrem", *The Harp* 3:1/2 (1990), pp.61-66. For a better approach see, A. de Halleux, "Mar Éphrem théologien", *PdO* 4 (1973), pp 35-54; L. Leloir, "L'actualité du message d' Éphrem", *PdO* 4 (1973), pp.55-72; M. Schmidt, "Influence de saint Éphrem sur la littérature latine et allemande du debut du moyen-âge", *PdO* 4 (1973), pp.325-341; L. Sako, "Ephrem's teaching: a source for updating catechism", *The Harp* 1:2/3 (1988), pp.63-72.

(which inevitably leads to false conclusions) is, after all, Ephrem's main contention with his contemporary Arians:³⁷

“For Ephrem, their sin and folly is not merely in the incorrectness of their doctrine; it is prior to this, consisting in their presuming to subject the Godhead ‘at all’ to human inquiry ... His attack on ‘inquiry’ is a main theme of the (*HdF*); Ephrem's answer is both to insist on, and brilliantly to exemplify, the necessity of a symbolic and analogical approach to theology”.

THE JOURNEY ALONG THE ROYAL HIGHWAY: EPHREM'S RESPECT FOR THE ONTOLOGICAL CHASM

The inability of the created to cross the ontological chasm is only a starting point in Ephrem's theology. Once the need for a different language is established, he will go on depicting and describing God in every possible way. ‘Prying into’ the Divine is ruled out. But what about the legitimate search which Ephrem pursues so ardently? In order to clarify his method of searching and never forgetting the chasm, the following texts provide more light. These particular texts are chosen only as a few examples for Ephrem's approach in searching what can be searched out and his intellectual fear of prying into what is beyond the ontological chasm.

³⁷ R. Murray, “A hymn of St Ephrem to Christ on the incarnation, the Holy Spirit, and the sacraments”, *ECR* 3 (1970), p.149. Murray highlights the same theme in his “St Ephrem's Dialogue of Reason and Love”, *Sobornost incorporating ECR* 2:2 (1980), pp.26-40. Many years later he came back to this theme and indeed it is a welcome addition. Cf. R. Murray, “The Paradox of God's Hiddenness and Accessibility in St Ephrem”, *New Blackfriars* 996 (85) (2004), 158-162.

Royal Highway and Pathless Desert
*HdF 65: 1*³⁸

Who is ever so mad as to seek without light,
 Both to search without bright light
 And grope without a flash of light?
 For, outside of the Scriptures, the foolish scribes went
 out,
 To wander into a pathless desert and they left the
 Testament:
 The Way of the Kingdom - prophets were its
 milestones,
 Apostles its inns.

Happy the searching
*HdF 2: 11-14*³⁹

11

Happy is he who has made for him
 The right measure of being beaten out
 Into that (measure) of prophets and apostles,
 The measure which righteousness made.

12

Happy is he who has balanced his searching
 With the benefit of his audience;
 Not weighed (too) light to be insufficient,
 Not (too) heavy to be sunk.

³⁸ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.200-201.

³⁹ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.6.

13

Happy is he who in his haste,
Has not crossed the boundary.⁴⁰
Happy is he whose waiting⁴¹
Toils and reaches the inn.

14

Happy is he who toils,
Seeks for something which he can find;
Happy is he who is not shattered
By searching the unattainable.

Venom of Greek Wisdom

HdF 2:23-24⁴²

23

Happy is the one, My Lord!
Whose tongue has become a clear vessel,
And with it spoke the truth that flows
From prophets and apostles.

24

Happy is he who has not tasted venom,
Namely the wisdom of Greeks.⁴³

⁴⁰ *ṭhōmā* is often associated with *peḥtā* and means more or less the same in Ephrem's system of thought in such cases.

⁴¹ Patience, slowness, etc., is in contrast with the 'haste' of the unhappy ones mentioned in the previous verse.

⁴² *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, p.7.

⁴³ Probably an autobiographical remark. One will be easily misinterpreting Ephrem if this is taken to be his general attitude towards Greek philosophy in the context of theologizing. Ephrem has no such general attitude since his adversaries are not Greek philosophers and he had no direct and profound access to their views. His opposition is towards the Arian use of Greek wisdom to confound simple people whose champion Ephrem seems to be. So the *pšītūtā* of the apostles is contrasted with the poison of the wisdom of Greeks. Here we give similar texts from *HdF* to illustrate Ephrem's position.

Happy is he who has not ejected the simplicity of the
apostles.

Arriving at the Inn

HdF 5:1⁴⁴

The mind⁴⁵ of the Watchers
Investigates with moderation.
The mind⁴⁶ of a human being
Wanders without moderation.
Your mercy has set up on the Way,
Inns and milestones,
So that they may proceed in it with order -
The confounded investigators.
Happy is he who has measured⁴⁷
The distance with his walking⁴⁸
To arrive at the inn.

HdF 44:11.6: 'the followers of error worship the illusion of their wisdom'. *HdF* 47:11: Apostle Paul defeated the audacious ones in the mother city (Athens) of the Greeks (Acts 17:16-34). *HdF* 79:3.2: 'Greeks, the scrutinizers of (divine) mysteries' (1Cor 1:19-25). *HdF* 87:4.5: 'hidden moth from the Greeks'. Later, as we deal with *Pr Ref* we shall come back to this point to show Ephrem's appreciation for great Greek sages and his contempt for those who misinterpret them. Ephrem taken out of his different textual contexts can be misleading.

⁴⁴ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, p.16.

⁴⁵ See *īda 'tā* in J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.188.

⁴⁶ See above n 45.

⁴⁷ Variant: 'found'.

⁴⁸ Variant: mind/knowledge. A well-balanced intellectual journey is understood.

Wandering Fools will not meet the King
*HdF 66:23-24*⁴⁹

23

Milestones are erected on the Way of the King.
 Fools have left it and they adhere to a pathless desert;
 And behold! They wander in it.

24

Anyone who travels by the Way of the King,
 He is the one travelling to meet the King,
 And (to receive) His gift.

From Paradise to Paradise

*HcH 22:8*⁵⁰

Plain is the Way for the simple ones,
 That (Way) which is faith,
 A beaten (track), of inns and milestones,
 From paradise to paradise;
 For, through Adam - the exit,
 And with the robber⁵¹ - the return.
 But investigations, like (wrong) turns,
 Cast out those who investigated
 From the plain (path) into a rugged place.
 Blessed be He who protects the simple.

⁴⁹ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.206. In this text Ephrem reminds us of the *Hymn of the Pearl*. See A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, (Leiden 1962), pp.120-125.

⁵⁰ *CSCO 169 Syr 76*, pp.80-81. The parallel between Adam's exit and that of the scrutinizers is implied here; the contrast between Adam and the good thief also in *HdF 84:1*.

⁵¹ See Lk 23:43.

Victorious Robber

HdF 84: 1⁵²

The robber won faith,
That which won him, and it brought him in and
placed him
In paradise; he saw it on the cross,
The Tree of life; It became a fruit;
And he, instead of Adam, the taster.

Our Insufficiency

HdF 48:2⁵³

If we could have been self-sufficient in everything,
The Lord of everything would have been extremely
despicable to us;
And if we had been the crucible of investigations,
Nobody would have lead astray with his speech,
Because our soul is like a hand
That is unable to write the alphabet untaught.

Who is Greater?

$$HdF\ 71:2-13^{54}$$

2

For, if He had made a vessel in which
He could be contained; greater is the created (being)
Than its Maker.

⁵² *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.257.

⁵³ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.152.

⁵⁴ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.217-219.

3

This would be a folly, that the created (being), should
be

Greater and superior whereas it's Maker
Would be inferior to it.

4

And if indeed great is that Creator,
The creature He made - how can it stretch itself out
Against His knowledge?

5

And if He made something which can
Stretch itself out against Him, (then) He is unstable,
And not to be believed.

6

But at the same time it is a wonder: everything which
He made.

For, (though) greater the Creator, praiseworthy are
Also His creatures.

7

Great (is) the creation, because great(er) is it's
Creator;

Yet (it is) small, for however exalted it is,
(Compared to) Him it is weak.

8

This is not to say: What He made is (indeed) small,
On account of His love. But small it is for Him,
Because of His glory.

9

And also, the Creator (was) not against Himself,
Struggling to create something
Which would limit Him.

10

He was not against Himself, nor was He contending,
That Creator, so as to make something
Which would confine Him!

11

Nor there was (any) envy between Creator
And creatures, for He was clad with love
Towards His 'possessions'.

12

There is no way for any created (being)
To become an equal, through its knowledge,
Of Him who is its Creator.

13

About creation, the Scriptures proclaim:
However great it might become, it (remains) much
small(er)
Than its Creator.

'He is' is Our Knowledge

*HdF 72:5-7*⁵⁵

5

But not even for this is your running sufficient:⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.220.

⁵⁶ Running after God like a hunter is insufficient because even the knowledge that 'He is' is a divine gift or revelation; the existence of God is not a discovery of man, no result of intellectual search. God is

That without Him, even that 'He is',
You are unable to know.

6

Even for ever and ever, you may dispute;⁵⁷
This alone He gave you: that you can know
That, 'He is'.

7

And however (exceedingly) he who toils, toils
himself,
This he will know; but apart from this,
There is nothing that he knows.

the starting point of our knowledge about God. Ex 3: 14 is the text alluded to, though Beck sees here the “ ‘Gnaden’charakter der sogenannten ‘natürlichen’ Gotteserkenntnis”. See E. Beck, in *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.190n 2; idem, *Ephraems Reden.*, pp.42-51. As Beck admits (p. 47) Ephrem knows no division between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ in our knowledge about God. This concept is most basic to the theological world of Ephrem. The so-called ‘natural’ knowledge simply does not exist at all in Ephrem’s thought. The reason why there is no such distinction is clear: According to Ephrem, creation itself contains revelation though the process of revelation is an ongoing progression from Nature, through Scripture towards the incarnate Son. For him existence of God is not a postulate of human reasoning; instead it is something revealed to human reason. That is to say, Ephrem cannot think of God in pure abstract terms. Here one can detect in Ephrem a Semitic way of thinking.

⁵⁷ According to Ephrem there is nothing we can really add to this already given knowledge, that ‘He is’. What he asserts is only the impossibility of going beyond the ontological chasm; he never denies the validity of theologizing and the significance of every possible intellectual investigation on our side of the chasm as clear from *SdF 6 : 259-296 = CSCO 212 Syr 88*, p.47. His real objection is to an intellectual scrutiny of God as if He were on our side of the chasm. If He were really a creature He is no God at all, and hence the question of the real God - the Creator - who is not a creature.

Above Human Inquiry

SdF 1:133-176⁵⁸

133

Not just as how heaven is high,
 Is the Lord of heaven higher than you.⁵⁹
 The height of heaven is measurable,
 But the height of the Creator is immeasurable.

137

For, everything which is a creature,
 In measure (it may be) greater than its fellow-
 creature.

Without measure, high and hidden
 Is the Creator, from His creatures.

141

A creature is a mate of its fellow-(creature),
 (And) distant from it (only) through a space.⁶⁰
 But the Creator is remote
 Through His Being,⁶¹ from His possessions.⁶²

⁵⁸ *CSCO* 212 Syr 88, p.4.

⁵⁹ The way of speaking about God should not be confused with God Himself; He remains beyond our language. But He cannot be spoken of without our language. So there is a tension between speech and silence in the theological language envisaged by Ephrem, as we shall see later.

⁶⁰ The 'distance' between creatures is only a matter of time/space/place, quantity, measure, etc. but the chasm between Creator and creature is ontological.

⁶¹ *Ītūtā*; see E Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp.5-13; idem, *Ephräms polemik gegen Mani und Manichäer*, pp.30-31; 39-42; idem, *Ephräms des Syrers Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre*, pp.107-108; 164-165; idem, "Bardaisan und seine Schule bei Ephräm", *LM* 91 (1978), pp.271-333; *Thes Syr_I*, 45, 173-174, 1563-1564. "Essentia" and "ousia" are not exact renderings because Ephrem is not thinking in abstract or philosophical categories. Perhaps more attention has to be given to each context in the light of Ex 3:14, a text central in the Neo-Arian

145

One (alone) is nearer to Him than all,
 That One through Whom He created all.
 A servant does not approach Him,
 For His Son is near to Him.

149

He has no mate at His side,⁶³
 His Begotten sits at His side.
 The gap⁶⁴ is great in the middle,
 Between Creator and creature.

153

Not that He did not cross over to its side,
 For, without Him it would not even exist.⁶⁵
 He is with it, but He is not with it;⁶⁶

controversy. See M. Wiles, "Eunomius: hair-splitting dialectician or defender of the accessibility of salvation?" , *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in honour of Henry Chadwick*, R. Williams, ed., (Cambridge 1989), pp.166-167.

⁶² Possessions or belongings of God mean everything which is on our side of the chasm - everything except God the Creator - and they are contrasted with Himself, His Being. What God has (created) is not what God is. See *HdF* 69:12, 71:11; see above Chapter I n 9.

⁶³ The same idea also in *HdF* 4:1.7: *layt leh bar mawtbā*.

⁶⁴ *tawrā* here is same as *pehtā* in *HdF* 15:5 and 69:11. See *Thes Syr* I, 1449-1450; *Supplement to Thes Syr*, 141.

⁶⁵ *Ītyā* is 'being' here, but it is not deriving from *Ītyā*. Coming into existence or being 'a being', is because of God's love. In other words creation means revelation of God and His love. See above, nn 60-62; E. Beck, *Ephrām's Trinitätslehre*, pp.67-68, 78-79.

⁶⁶ The language of paradox is crucial in Ephrem's approach. Our language has to express, but always with a fear to express too much and end up expressing nothing sound about a mystery.

For He is mingled with (it),⁶⁷ but (He is) separate
from it.

157

However near the sun is to the earth,
Its nature is distant from that of (earth).
The nature of earth is not like
The glorious nature of light.

161

And also gold, though it is from the (earth),
Is separate from it, but mixed with it.⁶⁸
How much more separate the Creator
From creation, though He is with it.

165

He remains higher than every inquiry (about Him),
However far will you may press on, O weakling,
Dust that dwells upon dust,
Let your converse⁶⁹ be about dust.

169

Even the dust which is under you,
Is too high for you in its inquiry.
If the lowest is too high for you,
How (can) you arrive at the Most High?

⁶⁷ Ephrem cannot think of creatures without thinking about the Creator since creation itself is revelation of the Creator. The importance of the created world is clear in Ephrem's thought. See S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.136-140.

⁶⁸ See above nn 66-67.

⁶⁹ 'enyānā means toil, business, travail, study, acquaintance, etc. See J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.420. Here dust stands for the created realm in general.

173

- If dust - your cognate -
 Is on your side,⁷⁰ but hidden from you,
 How (can) you trace the Majesty -
 The greatest of all in its inquiry?

He is as if He is Not

HdF 55:9⁷¹

Who can - O my beloved ones - search out
 Or comprehend something which IS Not?
 Thus too it is difficult and impossible

⁷⁰ See *CSCO 212 Syr 88*, p.4n 10; *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.7n 20. According to Beck (following Y) it is ‘from which you are (created)’. But is Ephrem speaking about dust as a created companion of human being (and hence on his side of the chasm), or as the earth from which human beings were created? In the previous stanzas ‘dust’ stands for everything that is created and not just the ground from which human beings were created. See also, *CSCO 212 Syr 88*, pp.4-7; *men* in *Thes Syr II*, 2154-2160; my “Imagery of Dust in Ephrem,” *The Harp* 18 (2005), pp.357-364.

⁷¹ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.172-173. This text explains why we cannot cross the ontological chasm by means of our created intellect. There is absolutely no existential link between what is on our side of the chasm and what is beyond the chasm. The intellect cannot have a starting point for its inquiry. Where the intellect is to start is the real problem. In Ephrem’s opinion scrutinizing Non-being is easier for the intellect than scrutinizing the Being (*Ītūtā*). Some four centuries later Theodore the Studite (759-826) writes: “And in regard to the doctrine of theology, so far as from inventing some kind of circumscription or comprehension (perish the idea! for this was an invention of pagan thought), we do not even know that the Godhead exists at all, or what sort of thing it is, as it alone understands about itself”, in C.P. Roth, *St. Theodore the Studite: On the Holy Icons*, (Crestwood 1981), p.21. See my “Ephrem’s Philosophy of Theological Language”, (Paper read at Ligugé Colloquium of the 17th Centenary of Ephrem, June 7-9, 2006, to be edited by B. Outtier).

To investigate that ONE WHO IS;
 And see how limited (you are),
 In view of searching Him, my son!
 For something which IS Not
 Gives witness to that ONE WHO IS,
 In this that investigating Him
 (Remains) completely out of reach.

SPEAKING ABOUT MYSTERY, BUT A CURTAIN OF SILENCE BEFORE THE MYSTERY

As is clear from what we have already seen, Ephrem's system of theologizing uses a highly imaginative and pictorial language. This is only because our language about God is not absolute and 'defining'. Since what we speak about is actually beyond definition, our speech has to consider these two dimensions: speaking about what we can know, and not speaking about that which lies beyond. While speaking about what lies beyond our faculties of knowledge and communication, 'silence' would be more eloquent than speech. Based on selected texts given already, and with reference to similar texts, the following pages try to summarize Ephrem's approach to divine mystery through both speech and silence.

A royal highway is available to any legitimate investigation. This is none other than Nature, Scripture and the incarnate Son - three witnesses,⁷² or means of revelation. The incarnation is the focal point of revelation because the Son plays on three harps: Nature, OT and NT.⁷³ Anyone who

⁷² See S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.26-28.

⁷³ *HdV* 27-30.

wanders from these sources deviates from the path and finds himself in a pathless desert. This picture reminds us of the disobedient people of God wandering in the desert and a whole generation failing to reach the Promised Land. But God has erected milestones to mark the distance, and to show the correct path to the royal palace. God has provided inns where the travelling people are to take temporary shelter and rest. Ephrem's texts dealing with milestones (prophets) and inns (apostles) have been studied by Beck.⁷⁴ Anyone who starts talking about God has only to look for symbols and types in Nature and in Scripture and interpret those sign-posts with the Key (the incarnate Son). It is primarily a Way of faith which also includes all the created intellectual faculties of human being.⁷⁵

There is always a problem in theologizing, the insufficiency of ordinary words. No human language is capable of giving an exact and final description. We try to describe in all possible words, but never forgetting the dimension of the ontological chasm. There is always the possibility of a valid description which is never going to be the definition of the indefinable God. The silence of the angels⁷⁶ is an example for our talkativeness. Silence is more eloquent than speaking too much and knowing little. Both silence and speech are complementary and communicative. That is why Ephrem is very enthusiastic about this eloquent

⁷⁴ E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Weg mit Meilensteinen und Herbergen bei Ephräm", *OC* 65 (1981), pp.1-39.

⁷⁵ *HdF* 1:1, 3:3, 4:11, 5:17-20, 7:6-11, 8:11, 9:3,10-11,13, 13:1,3-4,7-8,10, 16:6-10,12-13, 18:1,3,20:1-4,7-8,10-11,17, 21: 6, 23:2-3, 27:4-6, 36:17-18, 37:10, 43:6, 44:8, 49:6, 51:10-11, 13, 52:12, 54:1-12, 62:2, 64:10, 65:10-11, 69:6, 70:13, 72:1-4, 79:4,8, 80:1-4,7-10, 84:1-3,9-10, 85:2,13, 86:2,9, 87:2-3.

⁷⁶ *HdF* 4:6-9,17-18, 68:20-21.

and creative silence. Awe and wonder go along with such a silence before the divine mystery⁷⁷ which is, after all, beyond the ontological chasm. The ‘curtain of silence’⁷⁸ or the ‘seal of silence’,⁷⁹ often befits the created being before ‘the great mystery’ (*rāzā rabbā*).⁸⁰ The pot’s nature is to be silent when it is before the potter.⁸¹ There is a chasm, wall or boundary that radically separates them into two sides because the one is dependant on the other, and not vice versa. Ephrem is speaking about a dead end because no created reality can cross to the other side of the chasm. In the ultimate analysis the Creator remains absolutely alien to any created category trying to track down God as if He were a creature.⁸² Ephrem tries to explain this further with a few illustrations:⁸³ No artist can give us a picture of wind; (he may give a picture indicating the effect of wind on something visible). When we draw the picture of a human being we draw only a body, but no soul; we draw a person’s mouth, but not the voice of his speech. Colours cannot depict voice (*qālā*). Thoughts cannot

⁷⁷ *HdF* 1:18-19, 2:4,6-7, 3:4, 9-15, 4:1, 4-5, 8, 11, 13-14, 17-18, 7:3-6, 10, 8:2-3, 10:2,20, 11:5-9, 13:10, 15:2, 16:12-13, 20:1,6, 21:2, 22:10-12, 23:15, 28:10, 29:1, 32:6, 37:17-18, 38:2-3,8-10, 13, 39:5, 43:2-3, 50:4, 54:2, 57:6-8,10, 64:9, 67:5,23, 70:7-9, 72:1, (74:18-27). God’s being the incomprehensible mystery and the consequent tension between speech and silence is an important theme in Gregory of Nazianzus. See G. Kondothra, “The word, human and divine: an approach of Gregory of Nazianzen”, *SP* 16 (1985), pp.385-388.

⁷⁸ *HdF* 44:8.6.

⁷⁹ *HdF* 67: 23.3.

⁸⁰ *HdF* 75:15.3, 76:2.3, 81:3.3, 82:4.2. I am happy to note that this paradox between word and silence is further explored in his doctoral dissertation by den Biesen, *Simple and Bold. Ephrem’s Art of Symbolic Thought*, (Piscataway 2006).

⁸¹ *HdF* 29:6, 37:21-22, 67:18-19, 77:7. See *Is* 29:16, *Jer* 18:6, *Rom* 9:20-21.

⁸² See *HdF* 9:14, 11:1-2,10-17, 14:9, 15:3-4,10, 22:11, 27:2-3, 36:16, 37:24, 39:5, 50:3, 63:12, 69:16-21, 70:5, 75:25; etc.

⁸³ *HdF* 33.

define the Divine Being beyond the ontological chasm; but thoughts can depict the Divine Being on our side of the chasm with the help of the three witnesses already mentioned, by listening to the harmonious music on 'three harps'. There is no connecting link between our limited understanding and the hiddenness of Divine reality.⁸⁴ We cannot explore what is totally and absolutely 'unrelated' to us in Being⁸⁵ as we have nowhere to start from. Our state of being created involves love from the part of Creator; but it involves no actual sharing in the nature of Creator as Being. The Being of God is the Being upon whose love our being depends. That is to say, created being is the result of an action (creation) and not an automatic emanation from the Being of God; love from the part of God is at the root of this action and this relationship of love towards the 'possessions' continues from God's part. Creation is only the revelation of divine love; incarnation is only the continuation of the same divine love. This primacy of all pervading love of God is common to later Syriac tradition.

The impossibility of crossing the ontological chasm on the part of creatures is something natural. Ephrem explains this situation with some parallels. The colour of wind is totally beyond our vision.⁸⁶ The eyes are meant to see the visible and not the invisible. There is no room to contain God's being; nor can any created mind pry into it.⁸⁷ The reach of our thoughts is too limited to go beyond the ontological chasm to arrive at the Son or the Father.⁸⁸ Our createdness is like an eye which is blind in itself, but able to

⁸⁴ See *HdF* 70:16-21, 71:12, 19, 75:25-26; see above n 83.

⁸⁵ *HdF* 41:5-6, 55:1-2, 9-10, 69:1-3; etc.

⁸⁶ *HdF* 42:1-3.

⁸⁷ *HdF* 45:8, 55:11-12, 64:8, 72:16, 18.

⁸⁸ *HdF* 47:3-4, 50:3, 52:9; etc.

see if light enters it.⁸⁹ A blind person trusts his physician, without himself verifying the medicaments.⁹⁰ Any attempt to track down God is counter to faith in God.⁹¹ But for Ephrem there is no real contradiction between reason and faith. Scrutinizing means distrust and wandering away from the correct path trodden by Abraham and many others who believed.⁹² Abraham believed and hence he was silent⁹³ before the mystery. Nobody is able to measure the great ocean with a small or even a large vessel.⁹⁴ Just as fishes can survive only in water Scripture provide us safe havens for our ship of faith without which there is no safe journey.⁹⁵ Nature and Scripture serve as a mirror which we have to use if we are to travel by the royal highway set with milestones and inns.⁹⁶ God subjected Himself to human language which every believer can read in Nature and Scripture. 'He is' is given to us; but not the 'how', 'when', 'where', 'why', 'how great' etc.⁹⁷ Incarnation⁹⁸ is the Key⁹⁹ which opens the treasure-house of symbols, types, icons and their meaning contained in Nature and Scripture. God has crossed to our side in the incarnate Son who put on the body as well as names. The incarnate Son is the bridge¹⁰⁰ for our side of the chasm. Creation is revelation¹⁰¹ along with Scripture; from these two 'pure fountains',¹⁰² we find all we need, but in types, symbols,

⁸⁹ *HdF* 48:3, 73:13-16; etc.

⁹⁰ *HdF* 56: 11-12.

⁹¹ *HdF* 64:10.

⁹² *HdF* 56:1ff, 80:7; see E. Beck, "Glaube und Gebet bei Ephräm", *OC* 66 (1982), 15-50.

⁹³ *HdF* 56:3-6.

⁹⁴ *HdF* 69:5-6, 66:3f, 72:25-26.

⁹⁵ *HdF* 2:6, 5:9, 12:16, 18:7-9, 20:5, 41:2, 46:1, 48:7-10, 49:6, 53:3, 58:1ff, 64:11-12, 65:1-3, 69:5-7, 70:6, 80:8, 81:10-16, 86:2; etc.

⁹⁶ *HdF* 65:1ff, 48:4ff, 67:8f, 69:6-10, 79:10; see E. Beck "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm", *OC* 19 (1953), pp.5-24; see above n 74.

⁹⁷ *HdF* 30:2, 50:1ff, 55:9-10, 72:5-7; etc.

⁹⁸ *HdF* 51:1, 4:2, 10:6f, 17:5ff; etc.

⁹⁹ *HdF* 12:11, 67:22.

¹⁰⁰ *HdF* 5:14, 6:17.

¹⁰¹ *HdF* 6:16, 8:13, 11:6, 25:5-7; etc.

¹⁰² *HdF* 35: 7-8, 37:12; etc.

titles and names. Understanding the divine pedagogy is crucial to their interpretation, the Key being the Son. God put on a garment of names and spoke our language; like a person who teaches a parrot to speak, God teaches us.¹⁰³ The following text describes this divine pedagogy.

Depict Him in Names

HdF 26:5-6¹⁰⁴

Clearly the Sun instructs (us), my brethren,
That it is harmful to stare at (divine) Majesty;
For, His nature is too mighty for every mouth,
And it is entirely alien from every tongue;
And the senses have no idea how to depict it,
For they do not have sufficient range to reach it.
But the Books of Prophets undertook the idea¹⁰⁵
Of depicting Him in names.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ HdF 31. Eng trans. (31:1-7) in S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.43-45; but see below Chapter III.

¹⁰⁴ CSCO 154 Syr 73z, p.90.

¹⁰⁵ See Beck's note in CSCO 155 Syr 74, p.72n 9.

¹⁰⁶ The theory of divine names is a 'distinctive feature' in the Neo-Arian polemics. See M. Wiles, "Eunomius: hair-splitting dialectician", pp.157-172; G.C. Stead, "Logic and the application of names to God", in *El Contra Eunomium I*, pp.303-320. Stead explains the development of the theory of names in Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, and Eunomius; T. Kobusch, "Name und Sein. Zu den sprachphilosophischen Grundlagen in der Schrift *Contra Eunomium* des Gregor von Nyssa", in *El Contra Eunomium I*, pp.247-268.

6

Circumstances suggested that he should be spoken of
 Thus with them, without might.
 For if He had started to speak
 According to the awe and wonder of His Divinity,
 There would be a distraction to (our) listening,
 A stumbling block to (our) childishness.
 The simple would have gone astray,
 And the mature would have failed (to grasp).
 He used all (kinds) of illustrations
 So that everyone would have enough
 According to (his) ability.

CONCLUSION

There is an ontological chasm between Creator and creature whenever we start speaking about God. How can we forget this radical difference and still speak about God? As created beings we stand apart along with angels, demons and everything in nature. God is far away and very near at the same time. In Being God is far away; but in love God is very near to His 'belongings' (*qenyānē*). These 'possessions' have their 'being' only because of God's love which is at the root of every created reality. Thus there is a difference of quality as regards the Being, God, and beings which are only the 'possessions' of God. Forgetting the love of the Creator is utter ingratitude and going astray. Prying into the Divine Being is absolutely impossible as it is reducing the Creator to the level of creatures. But what about an intellectual search without going astray from the correct path? This we can attempt, and the only reason we can do so is because God has taken the initiative to teach us according to our ability. God

has erected a royal highway - Nature, Scripture and the Key of interpretation, the incarnate Son - with milestones on both sides and inns here and there. It is like travelling in stormy waters, but safe in a ship (faith) which can find safe havens¹⁰⁷ in Nature and Scripture. The divine pedagogy unfolds itself in our language, using titles and names which become bridges for our understanding and safe ports to our ship of faith.

¹⁰⁷ For an analogous view in Gregory of Nazianzus, see B. Lorenz, "Zur Seefahrt des Lebens in den Gedichten des Gregor von Nazianz", *Vig Chr* 33 (1979), pp.234-241. For the sources and the later liturgical development of this theme, see E.R. Hambye, "The symbol of the 'coming to the harbour' in the Syriac tradition", *Symposium Syriacum* 1972, (OCA 197, Rome 1974), pp.401-411; R. Murray, *Symbols*, pp.249-253.

PART II

EPHREM'S THEOLOGY OF DIVINE NAMES AND TITLES

INTRODUCTION

After noting the philosophical rationale which lies behind Ephrem's proposed methodology for the conduct of theological discourse we saw how he puts this into practice; in Ephrem's view God initiated and sanctioned such a method by coming to us 'incarnate' in human language, adopting our names as His titles, giving us His names as our appellations. It is a revelation by means of our speech, rather than a case of God's language being given to us. In the following four chapters we shall go through all the important texts in which Ephrem speaks about divine names and titles. But before such an analysis of the texts it is necessary to summarize the various studies that have been published on the theme of divine names¹ in Ephrem by other scholars.

¹ For a general view and further bibliography on this theme common to all religions see art. "Names", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* 9, J. Hastings, ed., (Edinburgh 1917), pp.130-181; H. Bietenhard, "Onoma", *TDNT* 5, (Grand Rapids repr.1987), pp.242-283; B. Gladigow, "Gottesnamen (Gottesepitheta)", *RAC* 11 (Stuttgart 1981),

Hausherr offered a brief presentation of divine names in Ephrem in a chapter entitled ‘Scriptural and Patristic Names’. Among the Fathers he includes the Apostolic Fathers, Irenaeus, Origen, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, Aphraates, Ephrem, Pseudo-Denys and Isaac of Nineveh. To one’s pleasant surprise it is remarkable that Hausherr devoted more pages to Ephrem than to any other patristic theologian.² Hausherr analyzed Ephrem’s theory of names and pointed out the significance of HcH 53 in this regard;³ he noticed that Ephrem “spoke frequently of names, especially in polemics against heretics”.⁴ Hausherr identified “four different categories of names: false names, borrowed names, analogical names given by divine grace, and true names that correspond to reality and to its operations. So far there is nothing Semitic about his philosophy of the name. It is simply common sense”.⁵ Hausherr based these views on *HcH* 53:7-8, 12-13; 54:5-8. “We begin to discern a possible

1202-1278; art. “Names (Personal)”, *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 9, (New York, London 1905), pp.152-165; art. “Names”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 12, (Jerusalem 1972, repr.1978), pp.802-813; J. Dupont, “Nom de Jésus”, *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément* 6, (Paris 1960), 514-541; F.M. Denny, “Names and Naming”, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 10, (New York, London 1987), pp.300-307. For ‘names’ in Neo-Platonism, see M. Hirschle, *Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie im Neoplatonismus. Mit einem Exkursus zu ‘Demokrit’ B 142*, (BKP 96, Meisenheim am Glan 1979); A recent study based on Plato, Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas and Uesener, see G. Bader, “Theologia poetica”, *ZThK* 83 (1986), pp.188-237; idem “Gottesnennen: Von Götternamen zu göttlichen Namen”, *ZThK* 86 (1989), pp.306-354. Bader’s study does not include the biblical and Semitic perspectives. See above Chapter II n 106.

² I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, C. Cummings, trans, (Kalamazoo 1978), pp. 42-52.

³ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, pp. 42-43.

⁴ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, p. 42.

⁵ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, pp. 43-44.

Semitic nuance when Ephrem concerns himself not about names that are properly divine but about names given to beings born on earth, including in particular the incarnate Word ... the incarnate Word has divine names and human names...”⁶ He identified one of the significant Ephremic notions as “the inscrutability of God and therefore also the inscrutability of the divine names (which Ephrem) directed against the indiscreetly curious”.⁷ This enabled Hausherr to notice the Ephremic view of divine condescension into “names that are more suited and appropriate to creatures, thus lowering himself in order to elevate his servants by giving them names proper to himself”.⁸ The theological significance of the name ‘Christians’ as understood in Ephrem’s works and how it finds expression in Ephrem’s devotion to the name of Jesus are also indicated by Hausherr.⁹ He writes: “... it must be said that Ephrem had a devotion to the name of Jesus unequalled by any other Greek author before or contemporary with him, including Origen”.¹⁰

Is it not a bit surprising that these statements are not seriously scrutinized by patristic scholars so far? It is quite strange that though Hausherr wrote such an excellent summary of Ephrem’s theology of divine names¹¹ no scholar has yet attempted a thorough study. In fact a decade before Hausherr, Beck had written about Ephremic themes such as the role of human names as a means of divine revelation,¹²

⁶ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, p. 44.

⁷ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, p. 44.

⁸ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, pp. 44-45; see *HdF* 63:7.

⁹ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, pp. 45-52.

¹⁰ I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, p. 48.

¹¹ *Noms du Christ et voies d'oraison* was published in 1960.

¹² E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp. 27-29.

accurate names and transitory names,¹³ common names,¹⁴ name and *qnōmā*,¹⁵ the unique Name,¹⁶ the names of Christ in the Arian and Neo-Arian controversy,¹⁷ Trinitarian personal names¹⁸ and Ephrem's general understanding of the idea of name.¹⁹ It was unfortunate that Beck did not pursue these introductory views any further.²⁰

It was Murray who for the first time convinced the scholarly world how significant the divine names and titles are in Acts of Judas Thomas, the Manichaean Psalms, Aphrahat, Ephrem and 'Symeon' of Mesopotamia (the author of the Macarian homilies).²¹ Murray writes: "Ephrem, in contrast with Aphrahat, has few lists (of litany-like series of titles) as such. He prefers to enlarge on the imagery implicit in a particular title, but even so he is content with comparatively few of the traditional titles, developing his own imagery freely and widely, according as his own genius

¹³ E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, p. 30.

¹⁴ E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, p. 13.

¹⁵ E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp. 19-20. *Qnōmā* is here *res* for Beck.

¹⁶ E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp. 65-67, 73.

¹⁸ E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, pp. 40, 82.

¹⁹ E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp. 14-16.

²⁰ In 1988 (June 29), in 1989 (July 31) and in 1990 (August 16), I repeatedly asked him 'why'. Every time his answer was a silent smile. But he acknowledged that he never thought that 'divine names' was such a significant theme in Ephrem's theology and he was eager to go through my work. He died on the 12th June 1991 before my viva exam (on 20th June) and all I could do was to pray at his tomb on 25th July. I suspect that he did not clearly recognize the crucial bearing of the Ephremic concept of ontological chasm on divine names and titles though he wrote about the gulf between God and creatures in his early as well as his later works. See E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp. 42-63; idem, *Ephräms des Syrsers Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre*, pp. 97-173.

²¹ R. Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 23, 27-28, 159-218, 294-295.

suggests to him. It could be said, in fact, that Ephrem has a whole implicit theology of the validity of symbols and names for divine realities, which in some respects anticipates the symbolic theology of the Iconodule Fathers and classical Byzantine iconographical theory”.²² Murray collected some important titles and presented a theological synthesis based on them.²³ The ‘validity of symbols and names for divine realities’ as understood in Ephrem’s works is crucial in interpreting Ephrem’s theological world.²⁴ “Central to Ephrem’s theological method is his conviction that ‘names’ are the veils which alone make the Godhead apprehensible”.²⁵ The present study will corroborate some of these observations.

While Murray’s approach concentrated more on a systematic analysis of selected divine names and titles Brock took a slightly different approach. After pointing out the concept of ontological chasm he delineated Ephrem’s understanding of divine names and titles based on a varied selection of Ephremic texts.²⁶ He explored the significance of ‘clothing metaphors’ in relation with ‘the garment of names’, and thus an extended dimension of ‘theosis’ through ‘names’ is put forward.²⁷ Louth has subsequently summarized the main findings of Brock.²⁸ But his summary is too short to give an adequate picture. Ephremic concepts of *qnōmā*,

²² R. Murray, *Symbols*, p. 166.

²³ R. Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 354-363.

²⁴ See R. Murray, “The theory of symbolism”, pp. 1-20.

²⁵ R. Murray, *Symbols*, p.166 n 7. In fact it was this footnote that prompted me to select this topic for my research.

²⁶ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.37-48.

²⁷ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp. 43-74, 123-128; idem, “Clothing Metaphors”, pp. 11- 38; idem, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 45- 49, 66-74.

²⁸ A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, (London, Wilton 1989), pp.79-81.

nature and name are further analyzed by Bou Mansour,²⁹ but with less precision. Bou Mansour attempts to understand the importance of ‘names’ in the context of Ephrem’s Trinitarian ideas.³⁰ The profound soteriological dimension of the Threefold Names in baptism is another notable nuance.³¹ Bou Mansour criticizes Beck for suspecting probable Stoic influence on Ephrem’s theory of names; for Bou Mansour Ephrem is rooted in the ‘Semitic’ tradition and there is no evidence for Stoic influence.³²

What I want to do here is to explore the theme of divine names further by making a fairly comprehensive analysis of Ephremic texts dealing with divine names and titles, taking for granted the conclusions reached by Murray and Brock. In a very recent study Bruns has attempted to point out the significance of the theme of divine names in the context of Ephrem’s Neo-Arian polemics.³³ Bruns’ study is only a most recent example that points to the centrality of the theme of divine names and titles in Ephrem’s theological thought. But I believe that there is more to be explored about this topic in the context of what we saw in chapters I and II.

²⁹ T.Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, pp. 8, 20, 72, 77, 130-132, 136-137, 159-162, 165-167, 169-186, 528-529.

³⁰ T.Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, pp.159ff.

³¹ T.Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, pp.166-167.

³² T.Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, p.169 n 5.

³³ P. Bruns, ‘Arius hellenizans? - Ephräm der Syrer und neo-arianischen Kontroversen seiner Zeit: Ein Beitrag zur Rezeption des Nizänums im syrischen Sprachraum’, *ZKG 101* (1990), pp. 21-57. Pages 36-43 are important in understanding the Christological dimension of Ephrem’s theology of names; idem, *Das Christusbild Aphrahats des Persischen Weisen*, (Bonn 1990), pp.153-183.

CHAPTER III

GOD'S DESCENT INTO OUR LANGUAGE

*HdF 31:1-11*¹

1

Let us thank Him who put on the names of (our)
limbs (*šmāhē d-haddāmē*)
It (Scripture) mentioned Him as ears² to teach us that
He listens to us.
It gave for Him the title eyes³ to instruct that He see
us.
He put on only the names of things⁴
And without having (any) wrath⁵ or repentance⁶ in
His Being (*b-ītūteh*)
He put on their names because of our weakness.

Refrain:

Blessed is He who appeared to our human race
In all (sorts of) images (*demwān*).⁷

¹ CSCO 154 Syr 73, pp.105-108.

² Ps 34: 15.

³ Ps 34: 15.

⁴ *šmāhē d-šebwātā*. That is, not the things themselves.

⁵ Ex 15:7.

⁶ Gen 6: 6.

⁷ metaphors.

2

Let us realize that if He had not put on the names
 Of these things, He could not speak with us humans;
 Through what is ours He came near to us.
 He put on our names so that He may clothe us
 With His own manner of life (*dīleh b-dubbārē*)⁸
 He asked for our form and put it on,
 And as a father with his children, He spoke with our
 childishness.

3

It is this image of ours (*dmūtan*) that He put on, yet
 He did not put on;⁹
 He took it off, yet He did not take it off; when He was
 clad He was stripped of it;¹⁰
 He put (it) on for (our) benefit, and stripped (it) off in
 exchange (*b-šuhlāpā*)¹¹.
 But as He strips off and puts on every image,
 He teaches that this is not the image¹² of His Being;
 Because His Being is hidden He depicted it through
 visible things (*b-galyātā*).¹³

⁸ The purpose is our ascent, and hence soteriological.

⁹ It is the 'image' that He put on, not the *šbūtā* of the image; see above n.4.

¹⁰ Incarnation-crucifixion is understood.

¹¹ 'in variation'. He puts on various images to teach us various things; also, to give us His names 'in exchange' for ours. There is a progression at every step. See K. McVey, "St. Ephrem's understanding of spiritual progress: some points of comparison with Origen of Alexandria", *The Harp* 1:2/3 (1988), pp.117-128.

¹² likeness, metaphor, picture, depiction, etc.

¹³ This is one of the most important and original concepts in Ephrem's theological language.

4

In one place He was like an Old Man and Ancient of
Days;¹⁴

On the other hand He was like Warrior, one Valiant
and Warlike;¹⁵

He was an Old Man for (the purpose of) judgement;¹⁶
He was Valiant for wrestling.¹⁷

In one place as though sluggish¹⁸ He ran,

In another place He was weary;¹⁹ in one place He was
sleepy,²⁰

In another place He was needy.²¹ With all means
He wearied Himself to gain us.

5

For this is the Good (One), who though He could
have with force

Made us pleasing²² without any trouble,

He toiled with all means

To make us act properly by our (own) free will,

So that we (ourselves) might depict our beauty

With the colours which our free will has collected.

But if He had adorned us, we would be like a
portrait²³

¹⁴ *Dan* 7:9.

¹⁵ *Ex* 15:3.

¹⁶ As it is clear from the context of *Dan* 7:9 judgement of family members or village belongs to the old man - patriarch - of the house. Judgement of society belongs to the Old Man surrounded by 'elders'. In Daniel's days the 'elders' failed to do the duty entrusted to them and so Daniel's vision!

¹⁷ 'contest' with Jacob. See *Gen* 32 : 24-30.

¹⁸ 'inert', 'delaying'; see *Pss* 40:17; 70:1.5.

¹⁹ *Is* 1:14, 7:13; see below n 28.

²⁰ *Pss* 44:23, 78:65. Also Christ sleeping in the boat? See below n 26.

²¹ ? *Jn* 4: 6.

²² 'beautiful', 'agreeable', 'act well', etc.

Which another has painted with his own colours
adorning Himself.

6

And also he who teaches a bird to speak²⁴
Hides himself behind a mirror and teaches it.
For when it turns to him who is speaking
It finds its own image before its eyes,
And it thinks that its fellow-bird is talking with it.
He arranges its image in front of it²⁵
That it may learn his speech through it.

7

Now, this bird is related to humanity;
And though the relationship exists, as if they were
strangers
He entices and teaches it through itself, through it he
speaks with it.
The Being which is exalted above all in all things
In His love has bent down its height and obtained
from us our manners;
He toiled with all in order to turn everyone to His
side.

²³ *šalmā* has to be ours!

²⁴ The same image used in a different context in *HdF* 21: 7.
The bird in question is most probably a parrot.

²⁵ See Beck's note in *CSCO* 155 *Syr* 74, p. 86 n 6; idem, "Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm", *OCP* 19 (1953), pp. 5-24. Philo, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius use the metaphor of mirror when they speak of our knowledge about God. See R. Mortley, "The mirror and 1 Cor.13, 12 in the epistemology of Clement of Alexandria", *Vig Chr* 30 (1976), pp.109-120; A. Hamilton, "Athanasius and the simile of the mirror", *Vig Chr* 34 (1980), pp.14-18; A. H. Armstrong, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, ch 6.

8

Now His image is that of an Old Man, or that of a
 Warrior;
 To Him (applies) that which is written, that
 'He slept',²⁶ or that He does not slumber;²⁷
 Of Him it is written that He was weary,²⁸
 Or that He does not become weary.²⁹
 In that He 'bound and unbound',³⁰ He has helped us
 to learn.
 He contracted Himself and stood on a tile of
 sapphire³¹
 He stretched Himself out and filled the heaven, while
 everything is in His palm.³²

9

He showed Himself in one place, yet He showed
 Himself everywhere.
 We supposed: 'Behold He is in a place'; everything is
 filled with Him.
 He became small to be a match for us; He became
 great to enrich us.
 He became small and great again, to make us great.
 If He had become small and not great (again),
 He would have been small and despicable for us,
 Because He is thought to be a weakling, therefore He
 became small and great.

²⁶ *Mt* 8:24; see above n 20.

²⁷ *Ps* 120:3-4.

²⁸ *Jn* 4:6; see above n 19.

²⁹ *Is* 40:28.

³⁰ 'esar šrā is an idiom for 'contradicting' one statement by another one.

³¹ *lbettā d-sappilā*. See *Ex* 24:10; 'brick' or 'plate' that served as footstool.

³² *Is* 40:12.

10

Let us wonder! When He became small He made our
smallness great.

But if He had not become great again,
He would have made our intelligence small
Because it thought that He was a weakling, and (as a
result)

It would have been small in what it thought.

He is the Being (*ītūtā*) for whose greatness we are
incompetent;

Not even for His smallness; He became great, we are
going astray.

And He became small, and we become ourselves
wretched/ helpless.

With all (means) He wearied Himself with us.

11

He wanted to teach us two things, that
He ‘became’³³ and He did not ‘become’.

In His love, He made for Himself appearances
Of His servants that they may look at Him.

But that we should not damage ourselves and think
that ‘He is thus’,

He changed from image to image to teach us,

That He has no image (*dmūtā*).

And though He did not depart from human picture,³⁴
He left it through His changes (*b-šuhlāpaw*).

³³ One can translate also: ‘It was He; but it was not He’. Then the obvious reference is to the incarnation. See *Jn* 1:14. But here Ephrem includes both the incarnation of God in human language and in human flesh. These two are not at the same level.

³⁴ *ṣurtā d-nāšutā*. Whatever picture God assumed it was an image that pertains to our realm as human beings. Thus Ephrem can speak of an incarnation of God into human language.

The pedagogical purpose of divine names has already been mentioned³⁵. It is the question of the ontological chasm that lies behind Ephrem's mind. How can God communicate with us, His creatures? He is able to come down to our level, though we are unable to go up to His level. Accordingly, He adapts His speech for our human language. It is in this context that Ephrem depicts the picture of someone teaching a parrot to speak. The parrot has to speak its master's language through the medium of its own language. As the parrot sees its own picture in the mirror it grasps that its fellow bird is speaking something. It picks up the voice and starts imitating the conversation. There is a divine condescension and a human conversion implied in the analogy. God arranges the mirror of Nature and Scripture and the bird turns towards the mirror which reflects human pictures. If only the bird turns towards the mirror it can learn the speech of its master. The voice that apparently comes from the mirror is really from behind the mirror. The analogy is not exact as Ephrem himself indicates when he says that the man and the parrot are both part of creation, whereas God and man, in the analogy of God teaching man, are separated by the 'chasm'. Ephrem sees mankind in the place of this bird learning the language of its Master. Here we come across the fundamental reason behind Ephrem's theological language: names are just means there for effective communication. As Murray has pointed out, 'name' often stands for language in Ephrem.³⁶

According to Ephrem's view theological language itself can be understood only in terms of 'image' (*dmūtā*). Implicitly he is carefully avoiding the dangers of literalism.

³⁵ See end of previous chapter.

³⁶ See R. Murray, "The theory of symbolism", p.10.

As this image is directly connected with what we see in, or hear from, the mirror, it does not invalidate its meaning. What we see is in and from the mirror; what we hear is from behind the mirror. What is human is all that we see in the mirror and hence it is ultimately ours. But since the speech itself is originating from behind and beyond the mirror, what we listen to is not from our realm. Thus it is both human and divine at the same time. The parrot sees its own reflection in that mirror when it turns round towards the mirror, attracted by the voice; that is to say, sight (for the eye) and voice (for the ear). One aspect does not and cannot exclude or dominate the other in theological discussion. We see our image or icon in the mirror and listen to the Master's voice. Even when we imitate the Master's voice it is only an imperfect imitation and hence one has to keep a balance between outright scrutiny and utter denial of the value of theological language. Ephrem's theology of divine names is not just about a few terms with which we describe God; it is instead concerned, on the one hand, with the way God has revealed Himself to us, and on the other hand, the way we speak about God and divine realities. The pedagogical dimension of divine titles is constantly and extensively a theme dear to Ephrem's way of theologizing.

The communication between God and humanity is impossible because there is no common language. We cannot understand His language. So He adopted our language which we are able to grasp. But since He spoke our language we should not suppose that He is no more beyond our language and our words. When God adopted our manner of speaking He adapted Himself to make Himself appear in human language, image and form. In the OT God appeared in human language in order to communicate with us; the voice of

divine speech was mediated through the mirror of human beings like Abraham or Moses. In the NT the Voice itself put on humanity. Thus incarnation is only the climax of divine speech, and hence also the ultimate means of divine communication and dialogue with us in and through our own language.³⁷ Ephrem would elucidate this idea elsewhere, though in stanza 3 both incarnation and crucifixion - putting on and being stripped of the human garment - are hinted at. If God put on our names the purpose is not God becoming man, but man becoming God-like. He put on many names that pertain to our domain, but at the same time remaining above and beyond those very names. He borrowed our manners and form so that He will be found by us in our form and we will be clothed with a divine manner of life. The term 'manner/way of life' (*dubbārā*) has ascetical resonances in later as well as in proto-monastic Syriac literature. God putting on our names, images, manners so that we may put on divine names and divine manners of life sums up the whole of salvation history.

Ephrem makes a clear distinction between image (*dmūtā*) and reality (*šbūtā*) of image. There is an inner relationship between both; *šbūtā* cannot be put on; but when 'image' is put on, it is the image of a reality and hence not simply an image apart from reality. Image and reality are inter-connected; at the same time they are distinct and separate. Concrete reality is really reflected in the mirror without multiplying the reality. Ephrem does not think in terms of Greek philosophy here. For him image means likeness, reflection, metaphor, picture, icon, sacrament, etc. The image is secondary to the reality, originating from and

³⁷ See below Chapter IV n 136.

representing the reality. There is no image without a reality whose reflection it is. The radical separation between image and reality is unthinkable for Ephrem, though image is not the reality. So, when God put on anger God really appeared angry (to whomsoever He was angry) but He was beyond anger. God's anger was only a temporary human garment He borrowed from our realm to teach us when we went astray. God puts on various images, forms, garments to instruct us and also to give us His images, names, garments in exchange (*b-šuhlāpā*).

By putting on various human images He teaches us that these human images are not 'the image' of His Being which is absolutely beyond our comprehension. God may put on images one after another to teach us something new and salvific. But we should not cling to one particular image forgetting all other images. When God put on a particular image He has a special pedagogical purpose. As a good teacher God applied the language of humanity to Himself while remaining above and beyond human language. The reflection is real, but not the reality. God has great respect for human free will;³⁸ otherwise He could have made us act in a manner pleasing to Him without putting on human names. He has left it to our free will to collect the colours to draw our own portrait. If He had forcefully adorned us with divine colours the portrait of humanity would have been less glorious. We should paint our picture by ourselves and that is what God wills and what our free will demands. And when we freely choose and use our colours the picture is glorious and hence of more worth.

³⁸ T. Bou Mansour, "La liberté chez s. Ephrem le Syrien", *PdO* 11 (1983), pp.89-156; *PdO* 12 (1984/5), pp.3-89; idem, "Aspects de la liberté humaine chez saint Ephrem le Syrien", *ETL* 60 (1984), pp. 252-282; idem, "La défense éphrémiennne de la liberté contre les doctrines marcionite, bardésanite et manichéenne", *OCP* 50 (1984), pp.331-346.

PROCLAIM THE NAMES, BUT DO NOT COMPARE

*HdF 58:4-5,7-8*³⁹

4

When a servant (‘*abdā*) searches well he finds his
fellow servants (*knawwāteh*)
And if he searches the creatures he finds his
neighbours
For His Lord is hidden from him; and how much
meaner is the name
Of dust⁴⁰ than that of God, even more mean is
disputing
About the Creator (‘*ābōdā*). In name and in reality
Both these (things) are mean.

5

Who would not accept this without controversy?
Just as it is not for the name of ‘created’ (*baryā*) and
‘made’ (‘*bidā*)
To rise in comparison
Against the name of Creator,⁴¹ so also the scrutiny of
Him
Is (too) light in the scales (weighed) against the
Glorious One
Through whom all (things) were created.

³⁹ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.180-181.

⁴⁰ *šmeh d-‘aprā*. The obvious allusion is to Adam’s creation from dust; see *Gen* 2:7.

⁴¹ *šmeh d-bārōyā* is in contrast with *šmeh d-‘aprā* which is mentioned in the previous stanza.

7

Speak what is of benefit and expound what (gives)
instruction.

Both explain for helping and dispute for building up.
Question the unbelievers and reprove the crucifiers.
Both investigate their books and solve their disputes.
Teach the childish and educate the simple,⁴²
And enlighten the ignorant.

8

Speak of (God's) Grace for He nourishes you freely.
Proclaim (God's) Justice for He rewards you
abundantly.

Bless His Being for He made you when you were not
(in existence).

Exalt His Fatherhood for He reckoned you among His
sons.

Look for His Kingdom, for behold, He has invited
you, even you!

And He has called you to His Table.

Human intellect can search and understand fellow human beings to some extent; it can also search all its 'neighbours' - that is the entire created universe. But God is 'hidden' - a concept mentioned also in *HdF* 31:3. God as hidden in Himself (but revealed in Nature, Scripture and Christ) is a much repeated theme in Ephrem. The Hidden One is beyond the ontological chasm and hence beyond any kind of scrutiny. The name and reality of dust are despicable; its investigation carries no weight against God. *Baryā* and '*bīdā* are no comparison to the name *bārōyā*. '*Aprā* can never

⁴² See *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.181 n 1.

rise up to the level of God; here Ephrem seems to allude to Adam's (the dust-formed) rebellion in Genesis. After clearly stating his stand against scrutinizers Ephrem does not hesitate to expound his own strategy which nobody can accuse of being anti-intellectual. When he explains the role of education in Christian life his positive attitude as regards human intellect and investigation are further clear. But his pedagogical motives are predominant and his theological themes are centred upon divine names and titles revealed in Scripture or illustrated in Nature. Five divine names - the Good, the Just, the Being, the Father, and the King - are implied in stanza 8.

ADAM THE NAME-GIVER

*HdF 62:2*⁴³

Who does not know that Adam gave the
names
Also to the animals,⁴⁴ and the names which
the servant (‘*abdā*) gave
Pleased the Lord of All and they were written
down and were believed.
But the children of Adam were not ashamed
To make the war of their disputations
Against Son’s name which God’s mouth
Proclaimed in their hearing.⁴⁵

⁴³ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.191-192.

⁴⁴ *Gen* 2: 19-20. 'Also' because it was Adam who named his wife 'Eve'. See *Gen* 2:23, 3:20.

⁴⁵ At the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, as explained by Ephrem elsewhere.

*CGen 2:9-10, 13*⁴⁶

9

But he said that He brought them to Adam so that he might show his wisdom and the kind of peace that existed between the animals and Adam before he transgressed the commandment...

10

Thus Adam received authority over the earth and became lord of all on this day that he was blessed ... On the same day he was given authority over everything and became rebellious against the Lord of everything, He gave him not only every authority which He had promised him but also the calling of names (*qaryūtā da-šmāhē*) which He had not promised him, was added to it ... But for one to give a few names is not a great matter if they are remembered. However it is excellent and noble on (the part of) humanity when one gives thousands of names in a single hour and without calling the latter by the names of the former. For one can bestow a multitude of names on a multitude of species such as reptiles and beasts and cattle and birds, but not to call one species by the name of another, this is of God, or of a human being to whom it has been given by God.

13

Adam named the newly formed (Eve) not yet with her personal name 'Eve' but with the appellation 'woman'.

CGen 2:14

Adam's wisdom is clear from his role as name-giver.

⁴⁶ *CSCO 152 Syr 71*, pp.30-31, 32.

CGen 2:15

Adam's (and Eve's) wisdom and authority over the beasts are emphasized again by pointing out his role as name-giver.

The sovereignty of Adam over the things he named is pointed out by Ephrem in *HcH* 11: 7. The name-giving shows Adam's glory, wisdom and worth.⁴⁷ It is a sign that God who created everything handed everything over to Adam.⁴⁸ God named the creatures; but He made Adam 'the last-formed' to be the eldest of all by allowing Adam to allocate names to all the animals. Even the serpent - the most cunning of all animals was infinitely inferior to Adam, and Eve should have questioned the serpent about its ignorance of its own name once. It was Adam who decided the name of the serpent and hence his superiority is indisputable. What Ephrem means here seems to be that, as the serpent pretended to enlighten Eve regarding the Tree of Life, she could easily have known that Adam who gave name even to the serpent should know better than the serpent and thus revealed the superior wisdom of humanity. All creatures were older than Adam in their identity and existence (*ba-qnōmayhōn*), but not 'in their names' (*ba-šmāhayhōn*).

HdE 46:3⁴⁹

If only Eve had demanded of that serpent:

"You have not even realized what your revealed name
is,⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *HcH* 20:8. The same view is found in Philo. See R. Marcus, *Philo. Supplement I. Questions and Answers on Genesis*, (LCL 380), pp.12-13. For Gregory of Nyssa, 'name-giving' is the sign of Adam's 'free-will'; see T. Kobusch, "Name und Sein", p.255.

⁴⁸ *HcH* 28:8; *HdE* 47:9. Philo too explains in great detail why 'the last-formed' Adam became 'king' of all creation. See F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker, *Philo I*, (LCL 226), pp.60 - 73; 116 - 119 (*De Opificio Mundi* 25-29, 52).

⁴⁹ *CSCO 198 Syr* 84, p.118.

So, see how estranged you are
 From the hidden things (*kasyātā*) of that Tree,
 Hidden from the Watchers, revealed to the simple!”

SELF-AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH NAMES

HdE 47:8-15⁵¹

8

Well, let us weigh you to compare (you) with Adam!
 But who will indeed compare a beast with a human
 being?

And yet if in that you are older
 Than Adam, your name will rebuke you,
 For it is much younger than Adam.

9

But He gave Adam (the authority) to proclaim their
 names,
 In order to make him much older than the animals.
 For children have never given names
 To their fathers: from the elders⁵²
 The names issue to the young.

10

And as God who is the First through His Being
 Himself, gave names to all creation,
 He allowed the last-formed⁵³ to become

⁵⁰ The serpent is ignorant of its very name; see *HdE* 47:8.

⁵¹ *CSCO* 198 *Syr* 84, pp.121-123.

⁵² *qaššīšē* is also the term used for ‘priests’. Adam is made ‘elder’ and ‘priest’ of the created world given over to him.

⁵³ *gbīlā* is often Adam in contrast to God who is *Gābōlā*; see *Gen* 2:7.

The eldest of all, because on all animals
He set names, as the elder (*qaššīšā*).

11

Indeed He made him last, but He also made him first!
For he is the youngest in his making, but eldest
through his glory.⁵⁴

And the firstlings who came into being before him,
Through their *qnōmā* (identity?),⁵⁵ are last
And the late-born in their names.

12

And why, O serpent, to Eve and animals
Alone did he proclaim names and left out all (the rest
of) creation?

Heaven and earth, together with paradise
Did not make war with Adam
For, there is not evil in creation.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See *CGen* 2:15,18, etc.

⁵⁵ Beck (p.118) translates *ba-qnōmayhōn* as “durch ihre körperliche (Existenz)” with the following note: “Das *qnōmā* ist hier offenbar nicht reine Umschreibung des Pronomens sondern behält seine eigne Bedeutung...” See E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp. 11 ff. But here Ephrem does not and cannot think of the “körperliche (Existenz)” in particular as if there is some existence outside the body for created beings. From the moment of ‘being in existence’ they were foremost; but they are not made ‘older’ as regards their names (even though God gave names to some of His creatures before He created Adam!). Beck’s adjective ‘körperliche’ does not in any way enhance Ephrem’s concept of *qnōmā* of created realities; it may even imply a double misinterpretation of Ephrem: first, a Neoplatonic view of existence as ‘ideas’ and ‘matter’; secondly, a Stoic understanding of every existence as a ‘corporeal’ existence. Beck has elsewhere tried to impose this Stoic view on Ephrem. Adam did not exist before he was created; nor did any created being before it was created. Here, *qnōmā* is anything that is that particular thing and not another thing; it is being in existence with self-identity, self-awareness, role and rank. Ephrem does not think of existence in purely abstract categories. Existence is concrete identity.

13

Indeed the Creator provided the names of created things
 But He gave to that servant the naming of animals,
 That he would recall that he himself gave
 The name to Eve and the name of serpent;
 He himself provided it lest they lead him astray.

14

So that if they should consider themselves to be
 greater than him,
 And come to lead him astray with a statement about
 the Tree
 He should reprove them on account of their names;
 Since they obtained their appellations from his
 knowledge;
 Dead (were they) who came to life through their
 names.

15

For behold, without names, the new born children
 Are as if dead to speech and hearing.
 But through their names they become living
 For the speakers and hearers,
 For those calling and answering.

As regards *qnōmā* (coming into being, existent, having identity) Adam is the last of God's creatures. But God decided to make the last-formed first of all by entrusting the naming of the first-formed to Adam. Adam received his

⁵⁶ For Ephrem, Evil is not associated with being but with the misuse of freedom by the being. So this is a clearly anti-Manichaean assertion.

name before the animal world and thus became 'elder' (*qaššīšā* = priest) and 'king'⁵⁷ of created universe. By becoming the elder Adam was able to name all beasts. God reversed the order of *qnōmā* by the order of name in the case of Adam. Both Adam and Eve could easily have defeated the serpent who owed its very name to Adam's wisdom. They should have known that the serpent's own statement about the Tree was false; if the serpent was able to know something which Adam did not already know (from God's commandment about the Tree) how could Adam be wiser than the serpent in order to give a name even to the serpent? Adam's superiority in wisdom over the serpent is understood from the name-giving. In spite of the serpent's cunning it was ignorant of its very name until Adam decided in his wisdom a proper name for the serpent, just like any other beast. Eve was not ignorant of all these things. By name-giving Adam is made priest (*qaššīšā*) of all created beings. All the animals he named were unable to gaze at Adam's glory. Eve too had a share in this glory. So the serpent came to Eve with eyes downcast unable to look at her glory! Their faces shone with brightness at which the animals were unable to gaze.

The imagery mentioned above has to be understood in the context of the Semitic understanding of the 'robe of glory' which Adam and Eve had in the beginning. The animals passing before Adam to receive their name from him with downcast faces has a parallel in the People of God who were unable to gaze at the shining face of Moses coming down from the mountain of God. Adam received 'priesthood'

⁵⁷ *HdP* 3: 14, 13: 3-4.

from God and later it was lost. In the Syriac tradition,⁵⁸ later Moses received priesthood from God and he handed it down to Aaron and others. That priesthood was received by John the Baptist because his father was a priest. Jesus took it from John at Jordan and gave over to His apostles. The 'shining face' and the idea of *qaššišā* are implicitly related.

Why did God entrust Adam with name-giving? Because God left it to Adam's freewill to decide the destiny - his own as well as that of the beings he named. It is clear that Adam did not give the names to all that God created. It is neither heaven, earth, nor paradise - all named by God - which made war with Adam, because there was nothing in creation created evil as such. No creature or uncreated being exists as an evil being set against Adam. Ephrem is writing this against the Manichaeans. For Ephrem no created being is created as an evil-being as evil is only the result of free choice on the part of created beings. Adam has no excuse for his transgression against God's commandment because it was he who gave names to Eve and the serpent, not God. When the serpent pretended to know something about the Tree Eve herself - who already knew that it was Adam who gave the name of serpent could have detected its malice; secondly she could also have asked Adam whether the serpent was indeed wiser than Adam to know something about the Tree which Adam did not know.

Adam who gave names to Eve as well as to the serpent could have even more easily found out the malice of the serpent. It was from the knowledge of Adam that Eve and the serpent received even their names and thus became aware of them selves. Until Adam called them by their names they

⁵⁸ *HcH* 22:19, 24:22; see R. Murray, *Symbols*, pp.178-182; S. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, pp. 58-62.

were as if dead. As Adam called them the names which he had fixed for them in his wisdom they came to life. Self-awareness and communication are associated with naming, which is also the starting point of description in words. New born children are given names and gradually they learn their own names. When someone calls them by their names they respond. This is true also about the animal kingdom. Thus names are necessary for creating self-awareness and thereby communication and knowledge. That is why Ephrem says about Eve and serpent: They were as if dead before Adam gave them their names. The names which God proclaimed over creation and those which Adam set for animals are able to instruct us against the heretics who give 'new names' (*šmāhē ḥadtē*) to creatures.⁵⁹ The names which Adam gave are in fact an adornment for the creatures.⁶⁰ These names enabled them to arouse self-awareness, and made the communication of knowledge possible. Anybody or anything without a name is dead since until a name is fixed no one can call it nor can it respond. Naming is the first step of describing and understanding something in words. The significance of knowing the names and appellations of God in order to invoke Him is a well-known concept in any religion. For Ephrem God's proper names are revealed whereas creatures are named by Adam.

⁵⁹ *HdE* 48:5.

⁶⁰ *HdF* 34:1.

PROPER NAMES AND BORROWED NAMES

*HdF 44:1-4*⁶¹

1

His names urge you how you should address Him⁶²
One (name) taught you that He is the Being; another
that He is the Creator.

He showed you that He is also the Good;
He made clear to you that He is the Just too.

Again He is named and called the Father.

The Scriptures have become the crucible; but why
does the fool talk idly?

Indeed, test, inside His crucible, His names and His
distinctions.⁶³

Refrain:

Praise to You from all who believe in Your titles!

2

But He has names perfect and accurate;⁶⁴

Also He has names borrowed and transient:⁶⁵

Suddenly He put them on; but suddenly He put them
off.

And even that He repented,⁶⁶ and He forgot⁶⁷ and He
remembered.⁶⁸

⁶¹ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.141-142.

⁶² *aykan w-man*: 'how and what'. Without knowing the names there is no knowledge and communication of knowledge.

⁶³ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.118 n 2 points out *HcH* 8:13, which speaks of 'names without distinction' in a different context.

⁶⁴ *šmāhē gmīrē w-ḥattītē*.

⁶⁵ *šmāhē š'ilē w-'ābōrē*.

⁶⁶ *Gen* 6:6.

⁶⁷ *Ps* 13:1.

And just as you have trusted that He is Just and also
Good,
Trust that He is Begetter, and believe that He is the
Creator.

3

Beware of His names perfect and holy;
For if you deny one of them, they all fly off.
They are bound to one another and they support
everything.

Like the pillars of the world,
Water, fire and air:
If one of them is missing the (whole) creation will
collapse.

4

The Jews recite⁶⁹ the names of God,
But they cannot be saved by a multitude of
appellations.
Since they rejected the One Name,⁷⁰ they were
rejected by the many (names).
The names which that People stripped off and cast
out,
In them the Peoples are baptized. And who can
unfasten

⁶⁸ *Gen* 9:15f.

⁶⁹ One can translate also as ‘repeat’, ‘narrate’ etc; but Beck seems to prefer another explanation by translating: ‘Es rezitieren die Juden die Namen Gottes’, with a note: ‘Anspielung auf das Achtzehnbittegebet?’ (E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.118 n 6).

⁷⁰ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.118 n 7: 'Geht wohl auf den Sohnesnamen'.

The Names which made a chasm (*peḥtā*) between us
and that People!

Ephrem is keen to point out the instructive value of divine names and titles. Each name has something specific to teach us. His names manifest Him to us and ‘make Him clear’ in our language. These names help us to invoke God and also to instruct us about Him. Five names - the Being, the Creator, the Good, the Just, the Father - are mentioned once again. In *HdF* 58:8 the name King is included in the list, but not the name Creator which is given already in stanzas 4-5. The names ‘Creator’ and ‘King’ are identical in the context of Ephrem’s understanding of creatures as *qenyānē*. In the same stanzas we find the names Lord, God, the Glorious One, all standing for the name Creator in contrast to servant, dust, *baryā* and *‘bīdā*. Scripture is the reliable crucible for every divine appellation, and Nature supports the Scripture as regards divine titles. God’s appellations are worthy of belief and adoration. As we see in the refrain to *HdF* 44 and 46:4 faith means holding and confessing God’s names to be trustworthy. It is the One behind the names that we trust and confess, and hence names serve as ‘sacrament’ or ‘icon’ that makes present what lies behind the visible. What is ‘hidden’ or lies behind as invisible is ‘revealed’ or made visible. For Ephrem such a faith is oriented towards praising the names and titles rather than scrutinizing them. In stanza 1 we find a critical note against adversaries who leave the scriptural names and still speak about God with blasphemous appellations. Scriptural names should be the foundation of our God-talk.

After this introduction Ephrem explains two crucial points in his theory of divine names. First, there are two kinds of names applicable to God: proper names and

borrowed names. Secondly, the latter type of names He puts on or puts off; but the former He does not put on or put off. This distinction is very important whenever Ephrem speaks about divine names. God's 'perfect and accurate (*gmīrē w-ḥattītē*) names' are pointed out in stanza 1. They are repeated in stanza 2 though the name *Ītyā* is left out as it is taken for granted. The term *ḥattītē* means exact, accurate, approved, found correct, true, faithful, steadfast, sure, real, that which truly is (opposed to apparent); *šmā ḥattītā* is a proper name; it is the term used for a proper noun in grammar.⁷¹ God's proper names are eternal and beyond alteration. He does not put them on or put them off. They are not given by our language or way of thinking; they are revealed to us in Scripture. But in contrast, our proper names are given ones (given by others) and hence unlike God's. God's proper names are 'revealed' for our benefit. Unlike our proper names, God's proper names reflect and depict God's qualities or action for our benefit though we are unable to go beyond these very names or portraits. One of God's proper names is 'Father' or 'Begetter' and hence as far as Ephrem is concerned there is no God without the Son and against Arianism one needs no more argument. Marcionites too are defeated as there is no God if His proper name is not Creator. Similarly the Bardaisanites cannot hold on to their concept of 'seven entities',⁷² or seven elements as there is only One Being. No doubt that Bardaisan thinks of 'entities' in Greek terms whereas Ephrem thinks and speaks in Semitic terms! When one follows Ephrem's logic strictly there is great depth and coherence in his thought.⁷³ Unfortunately it is very

⁷¹ See J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.113.

⁷² F.C. Burkitt, in *Pr Ref* II, p. cxxii-cxxxi; but see *HcH* 3:7, 4:6, 8:10, 12:9, 13:9, 51:13; etc

⁷³ A critical note of Bou Mansour against Beck's position stands. See Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, p.538 n 6.

difficult to perceive this unless one takes Ephrem on his own terms and also the whole genuine Ephremic corpus as a unit. He may not explain in one place what he has explained elsewhere, though there are often repetitions. Sometimes he takes for granted many of his important concepts.

The second category of God's names is 'borrowed and transient (*š'īlē w- 'ābōrē*) names'. The term *š'īlā* means borrowed, assumed, putative, pretended, secondary, feigned, unreal, supposed, reflected, reputed, etc.⁷⁴ The term *'ābōrā* means transitory, passing away.⁷⁵ God's assumed and fleeting names are really ours. God's borrowed names metaphors. He borrowed them occasionally to teach us some particular point. Why should He borrow our names (language) to teach us? He assumed our names from our language because that is the only language we are capable of understanding. The parrot has to be taught through the picture of a parrot reflected in the mirror.⁷⁶ Our childish state can understand God if only He comes down to our level; He has to cross the chasm to our side, in order to make Him manifest to us because by nature He is 'hidden' (beyond the ontological chasm). What is borrowed is also transient. Seeing that God has borrowed a name that actually belongs to us, 'the audacious' and 'the scrutinizers' might think that He is one of us, a fellow-servant. Ephrem gives three typical borrowed 'names' of God (which are parallel to the names such as 'sleepy', 'weary' 'sluggish' which we came across in *HdF* 31) to illustrate his point: God 'repented', 'forgot', 'remembered'. We immediately grasp that these are not

⁷⁴ J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.554: The glory on the face of Moses is *š'īla*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.398.

⁷⁶ See above, the translation and commentary on *HdF* 31 : 1-11, at the beginning of the present chapter.

names as such; but they are actions or conditions typically human. For Ephrem 'names' do not always mean just names. Whatever is explained as God's actions involves a name which can be a simple description. This name is in other words the very language with which Scripture describes God.⁷⁷ So God is named (as one having) 'ears', 'eyes', etc in *HdF* 31, as we have already seen.

God's borrowed names are always pedagogical and the shift of emphasis is on names as language/sense itself. Divine borrowed-names describe God's actions in human terms and so we have a language about God, a language fully human. Since what God borrowed from our parlance belongs ultimately to our realm, the distinction between God's proper names and borrowed names is fundamental in understanding Ephrem's theology of divine names and titles. God's borrowed names can be anything which we can easily grasp, because they are just terms/language we use in our daily life. Repentance (regret), forgetfulness and remembering belong to us. In Ephrem's terms these are some of our names when our actions express them. Behind these names there are our attitudes, experiences, feelings, actions or state; otherwise nobody will apply these names (terms) to us. The idea of God's actions (and presence) behind divine names and titles is well-known in Old Testament. He reveals, presents Himself and acts in and through these names. The divine action is significant as regards God's proper names as well as borrowed names.

In order that we may understand clearly - unlike the audacious scrutinizers - God has a special manner associated with the borrowed names. He puts them on suddenly and He

⁷⁷ See above n 36.

puts them off⁷⁸ suddenly. It is an unexpected and transitory intervention or action from the part of God. The clothing imagery is perhaps one of the most widely exploited themes in Ephrem and it underlines his genius in using and developing biblical metaphors. Why should God be in such a haste to change from one name/image to another? We may expect God to behave according to some particular manner with which we are accustomed. Using our intellect we make a lot of pictures about God and fix such images in our mind and think that God should be exactly like the pictures we already have. But He follows an action at times contradicting our expectation or plan and our traditional picture of God gets upside down. God's regret, forgetfulness, remembrance or similar actions, as understood in the biblical context involved, underline this. Suddenness of putting on or putting off necessarily means an upheaval of our preconceived ideas about a particular name/image of God. God's regret or the like are only a temporal and transient phenomenon aimed at teaching the people to change their own ways. After achieving the specific pedagogical purpose God puts on another name/image to teach something else. The different names He puts on and puts off are only a way of teaching us in a language borrowed from our usage. Thus salvation history is full of anthropomorphic language. The angry God is suddenly merciful when the people repent. It is not God who changes, but the people. Through God's actions people get a new picture/name of God, (or an old one which people have forgotten or neglected for some time). But in order that

⁷⁸ We do not explore nuances of this special metaphor in Ephrem's theology. See S. Brock, "Clothing metaphors", pp.11-40.

the people may change, God has to put on various names/images because He respects our freedom as human beings. The people of God in the OT experienced and interpreted the names/images, and so learned the ways of God. The people have to be taught different things on different occasions. The God who regretted the sinful generation during the flood, is also the God who wrestled with Jacob in order to change his name into Israel; He always fought for the people like a mighty warrior when the people walked in His ways or when the people cried for help, as we see in Judges; when the people forget Him, He too puts on forgetfulness of His love, mercy, promises, covenant, etc. To Daniel He appeared as an Old Man not because He was in fact, Old but because righteous judgement was not executed by judges of the people in Daniel's generation. He was appearing to Daniel to teach the People that the Real Judge is going to judge the iniquitous generation. Thus there are innumerable names/images of God in Scripture. Ephrem is able to pick them up and for him Scripture remains 'the crucible' (*kūrā*) for divine appellations and hence also for our God-talk.

Ephrem has something more to say about God's 'perfect and holy names': We cannot accept some of them and reject a few. Either we accept them all or we reject them all. Ephrem uses a lively illustration which he takes for granted. These perfect and holy names of God are like a company of birds. If you try to oust one of them they all set off together 'because they are bound together'. Then Ephrem has another illustration: Just as the whole creation is erected

on the pillars of water, fire and air,⁷⁹ so God is erected on His perfect and holy names. If you remove one of them the whole edifice would fall. There is no question of calling or speaking about God without accepting His names: the Being, the Creator who is both the Good and Just, the Father (who is never without the Son). Thus the views of Bardaisan, Marcion, and the Arians are automatically refuted as far as Ephrem is concerned. It is interesting to note that Ephrem does not speak explicitly about this here. Ephrem states his premises but his conclusion is often left to his readers or audience. If we do not observe this principle in reading Ephrem we may miss the originality, depth, clarity and logic of his thought. After taking for granted his above-mentioned position against the heretics Ephrem gives another example: the rejection of ‘the People’ who rejected the One Name (which is Jesus, the Son, though Ephrem does not say so explicitly as his audience knew this already). Here Jesus, the Son is the One Name which is identified with the *Ītyā* of the OT. Though they accepted and recited a multitude of divine appellations (*kunnāyē*), their rejection of One Name meant their being deserted by the many Names. Ephrem brings in another nuance to this One Name. The People stripped off and cast out the Names (One Name!); whereas the Nations are baptized in those Names. Ephrem’s audience could have easily followed his thought as identifying the One Name (‘Jesus’ as *Ītyā*!) and the Three Names. We then come across another use of the term *peḥtā*. The (Three) Names used in baptism made a chasm between the People and the Peoples!

⁷⁹ See *Pr Ref* II, pp.212-215.

THE REALITY BEHIND THE NAME

 $HdF\ 46:4, 8, 12^{80}$

4

Now if He has willed this, His ‘reality’⁸¹ agrees with
His name

But if He has not willed it, it would be contrary to His name:

Borrowed would be the name Father; borrowed (also)
the name Son.

His name is trustworthy and true is the name of His Son.

Confess and fear not, for His voice encourages you.

His voice is like a pledge which resounded⁸² about
His Son.

8

For He knows that even if He called mortals ‘sons’,
Their body would convince them that their nature is a creature:

Because He knows that the Watchers are our
companions,

⁸⁰ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.147, 148-149.

⁸¹ See G. Noujaim, "Essai sur quelques aspects de la philosophie", pp.30ff.

⁸² *yabbeb* means to make a joyful noise, sound (a trumpet), blow (a horn), to shout, to howl (as the wind). About this joyful blowing voice of the Father proclaiming, revealing and resounding over the Son (at the baptism and the transfiguration) Ephrem has more to say. The resounding noise made repeatedly by women during joyful occasions (such as a marriage feast) among many oriental nations is both a proclamation and jubilation.

Since their nature is high above us
 They were never called ‘sons of God’,⁸³
 Lest their names cause confusion because of their
 natures.

12

They were called ‘gods’; but He (alone) is the God of
 All.

They were called ‘fathers’, but He (alone) is the True
 (Father).

They were called ‘spirituals’, but He (alone) is the
 Living Spirit.

The ‘sons’ and ‘fathers’ (with) which they are called,
 Are (only) borrowed names which taught us through
 Grace

That One (alone) is the True Father⁸⁴
 Who (alone) has the True Son.⁸⁵

In stanza 4 Ephrem has his Arian adversaries in mind. *Šrārā* of God’s name means the same as the Reality of God. There is perfect identity between *šrārā* and *šmā* (name) which is ‘perfect and accurate’. This is not true in the case of

⁸³ See *CGen* 5:1, 6:2; *HdP* 1:11. In *Gen* 6:2 for Ephrem ‘sons of God’ are the children of Seth; that is, a name for human beings who are worthy of such an appellation. Baptism which confers the name ‘sons of God’ is also in Ephrem’s mind. Ephrem here rejects the older Jewish view that the ‘sons of God’ were angels (as in Enoch). See S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p.189; see above Chapter I n 26.

⁸⁴ *abā d-quštā*.

⁸⁵ *brā d-quštā*.

God's borrowed names. God is called Father because there is already the Son. Denial of *šmā* means also the denial of *šrārā*. Can God exist at all without the Son seeing that God has a proper name Father? Without the Son there is not even the Father. Ephrem cannot think of the Son as a subordinate to the Father, though Beck has attempted to show that there is a tint of subordinationism in Ephrem.⁸⁶ For Ephrem, both the Father and the Son are 'perfect and proper' names of God. If the name Son is borrowed from us the name Father too would be a feigned name and hence a contradiction in God. If the Arians would deny the Son's generation they have to deny the name Father first and thereby God Himself. As far as Ephrem is concerned, both the name 'Father' and 'Son' are trustworthy and true because these are God's proper names which are identified with God as the *Ītūtā*. Ephrem turns his attention to the voice of the Father which resounded over His Son at the baptism and transfiguration; that voice encourages believers to confess the Son's name. Thus revelation of divine proper names is meant to lead to confession of those names.

In stanza 8 Ephrem makes a significant note to the use of the name 'Son' and 'sons'. God called some mortals by the term 'sons' (in the OT; also Christians).⁸⁷ But humanity is able to know from its very nature that human beings are not divine sons in the physical sense. Their body is the witness to their mortal and weak nature - that of a created servant (*'abdā*). But in contrast the Son is not a created servant. He called us 'sons' so that we may know that the

⁸⁶ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.227 n 16; idem, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.23, 28-29, 95.

⁸⁷ See above n 83.

Watchers⁸⁸ are our fellow-servants. But no one would think that angels and we have the same nature just because we are their companions as creatures and worshippers of God. Ephrem has no difficulty in describing immortal and spiritual angels and mortal and physical humans both as rational companions. All created beings fall under a single category. On the other side there is the Creator. Ephrem makes a distinction: Angels are never called ‘sons of God’. If they too were called ‘sons’, there would have been confusion for our understanding because the natures of angels and of human beings are different. Both angels and human beings are put on our side of the chasm, not because of a common nature, but because both are creatures and both have the same Creator. If God had also called by the name ‘sons of God’ the angels who are ‘spiritual’ in nature our intellect would not be able to grasp the distinction between God and angels on the one hand, and angels and human beings on the other. As creatures, angels and human beings stand together, but according to nature they stand apart. Thus ‘nature’ (*kyānā*) serves as a distinguishing factor.

Some mortals are called ‘gods’, ‘fathers’, ‘spiritual beings’, ‘sons’. Ephrem asserts that these are really God’s proper names lent for our use. But those who put on these divine names get a reflection of the glory behind the names. These are only borrowed names (*šmāhē š’ilē*) as far as

⁸⁸ *īrē* do not sit or sleep. They are ever-vigilant and ever-standing before God in order to minister to Him. Servants do not sit before the Master. ‘Standing’ during liturgy in Oriental Churches is in imitation of Watchers who participate in the heavenly liturgy. See below Chapter IV n 2.

humanity is concerned. We come across the terms *šarrīrā* once and *quštā* twice in stanza 12. Both *šarrīrā* and *quštā* in connection with these names remain in God - in God's *qnōmā* and *kyānā*. In describing the terms Father and Son as God's proper names, though we use them as our borrowed names, Ephrem is carrying on his attack against Arianism. In his view, the Arians apply our terms to God as if the names Father and Son were human proper names borrowed by God. But if these are God's proper names which He used to teach us by allowing us to borrow them out of His Goodness, then the Arian views are proved false. For Ephrem, the names 'sons', 'fathers' in our language are just borrowed from God's 'perfect and proper names', thanks to His Goodness which He revealed in lending His names to us in order to teach us that we are in fact co-servants with angels. The pedagogical and salvific motive of divine names is paramount. The issue of who borrowed the names Father and Son from whom, is an interesting and original undercurrent in Ephrem's anti-Arian arguments.

BAPTISM IN THE THREE NAMES

HdF 51:7-8, 12⁸⁹

7

It is an audacity that we should call You by a name
that is alien

To that which Your Father called You:

'You are my Son', He called You alone

⁸⁹ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, pp.159-160.

At the river Jordan, and where You were also
baptized
The Threefold Mysteries⁹⁰ baptized Your humanity:
The Father with His voice and the Son with His
power
And the Spirit with His hovering-over.
Praises to Your hovering-over!

8

Who can hold false the Threefold Names
Since He has already enacted by the Jordan Their
 hovering over?
The truth is that in the names with which Your body
 was baptized,
Behold (our) bodies are baptized; and though
Very many are the names of the Lord of All,
In the Father and in the Son and in the Spirit
He baptized us, distinctly.
Praises to Your Majesty!

12

Again, from the names there has shone forth (*dnah*)
And come out to us the power of explanation.⁹¹

Witnesses are the names of the servant and the Son of
his Lord;
For both the name of servant teaches that it is not the
Son,

⁹⁰ In stanza 8 we read that *rāzē tltāyē* are the *śmāhē tltāyē*.

⁹¹ *havleh d-puššāqā*. See E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr* 74, p. 137 n 7.

And also the name of the Son cries out
 That He is not one of the fellow-servants;
 Their names proclaim concerning them without
 dispute.
 Praises to Your Majesty!

God called Jesus with the name Son at His baptism in the Jordan. This calling by name is also a significant theophany. Until now Jesus had not been revealed as the Son to the world. It is interesting to note that for the Syriac Churches the feast of Epiphany which celebrates the baptism of Jesus is at the same time a theophany. The revelation of the Son is also a theophany of the Three: the Threefold Mysteries and the Threefold Names are baptizing Jesus' humanity at Jordan. At Jesus' baptism three mysteries are revealed: the Father's voice, the Son's power (*ḥaylā*) and the Spirit's hovering-over (*ruhḥāpā*). The Father's resounding and jubilant voice⁹² needs no further explanation. But the Son's power and Spirit's hovering-over are to be clarified a little. In Lk 1:35 Peshitta reads:

*'na mal'akā w-'emar lāh ruhā d-quḏṣā tētē w-ḥayleh
 d-'ellāyā naggen 'alayk(y). meṭṭōl hānā haw d-
 metīled bek(y) qaddīšā (h)u: w-breh d-alāhā netqrē.*

The reading given above is explored by Ephrem in *CDiat* 21:3 and in *SdDN* 2 to show that at the annunciation the 'Power of the Most High' dwelt in Mary's womb. In the Syriac tradition the 'Power of the Most High' is usually the

⁹² *HdF* 46:7, 51:7; *Mt* 3:17. See above n 82.

Son who dwelt in Mary's womb.⁹³ That is why *Lk* 1:35 is connected with *Jn* 1:14 by using the same verb *aggen*. At Jesus' baptism that 'Power' which dwelt in Mary's womb is indwelling the womb of the Jordan, the mother of Christians. The same 'Power' would enter the womb of Sheol to give life to the dead. These three stages (incarnation, baptism and death/resurrection) are inter-related and inseparable, because as salvific divine actions, they are at the same time 'temporal' and beyond the 'temporal'. The Son is the Power incarnate in Jesus according to the later Syriac Christological view. This Power of the Most High resides in Mary's womb at the incarnation; the same Power is revealed in Jesus at His baptism; it is that Power which is being revealed in and through the words and deeds of Jesus. Here we do not discount the fact that the term *ruhḥāpā* alludes to *Gen* 1: 2⁹⁴ and in *Lk* 1: 35 and *Jn* 1: 14 we have *aggen*. The overshadowing of the Spirit over Mary at incarnation is followed by another hovering-over (*ruhḥāpā*) at the Jordan. *Ruhḥāpā* has liturgical connotations in the context of the descent of the Spirit over the baptismal waters and over the bread/wine (in the East Syriac tradition, symbols of the body of Jesus buried in the tomb awaiting resurrection!). The 'epiclesis' of the Spirit at incarnation, baptism, and resurrection of Jesus is a prelude to the liturgical epiclesis which occurs at our baptism and at the Eucharist and in the life to come. The incarnation

⁹³ S. P. Brock, "Passover annunciation and epiclesis: some remarks on the term *aggen* in the Syriac versions of *Lk* 1:35", *NT* 24 (1982), pp. 226-227.

⁹⁴ Ephrem on several occasions denies that the 'spirit of God' as Holy Spirit, but his use of the term *ruhḥāpā* certainly goes back ultimately to *Gen* 1:2. For the controversy over this passage, see S. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, pp.81-84.

and baptism are associated with two wombs - those of Mary and the Jordan, which are types of the tomb, the third womb. From each there is a new birth, rising up/ascent preceded by a death/descent. The Power of the Most High, 'descends' and dwells in the womb of Mary; that Power 'descends' into Jordan and 'ascends' after baptism. The descent into Sheol and the consequent ascent/rising from the tomb is a favourite theme in the early Syriac theological world. In *SdDN* 1 Ephrem speaks of three wombs: of *Ītūtā*, of Mary and of Sheol. But the womb of the Jordan is taken for granted as is clear from the context; when he writes in *SdDN* 2, about four births - from the Father, from Mary, the Jordan (baptism) and from Sheol- the theme of four wombs is in his mind. It is interesting to note that the liturgical celebration of the baptism of Jesus, or the feast of Epiphany, is called *denḥā* in Syriac, meaning 'rising of the sun, stars', etc.⁹⁵ The divine manifestation of Threefold names at Jordan is thus like sunrise which illuminates the world.

There are many divine names; but our baptism is based on three distinct names which no one can deny. Therefore the three names which form the basis of baptism are also a clear proclamation of divine mysteries already revealed.⁹⁶ There is an inner dynamism in names. Each name is pregnant with the power of explanation (*ḥayleh d-puṣṣāqā*). In other words, names contain the power for self-

⁹⁵ Here it is the 'Sun of righteousness'. But in *HdF* 40, 73 and 74 the analogy of the Sun is used for Trinity; see E. Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre*, pp.24-116.

⁹⁶ See *HdF* 13:5, 18:4, 48:1, 52:3, *HcH* 3:13, *HdV* 27:4-5.

interpretation of meaning. The meaning of names ‘rises up’ and ‘comes out’ enlightening our understanding. The terms *dnah* and *npaq* may implicitly bring out a comparison with the sunrise. The sun is not known to us except when it rises up and sends out its rays everywhere. The power of the sun reaches us in the form of light and heat. The meaning of a name comes out naturally (but not in a defining or absolute sense) and thus the name is self-explanatory. Ephrem illustrates this with two names: servant and the Son of his Lord. Servant is not the Son; nor is the Son servant. Here Ephrem seems to allude to the imagery and the inner meaning of these two terms in the parable of wicked servants and the Son of the Lord of the vineyard. Being the Son of the Lord, the Son is also the Lord of those servants. Thus in Ephrem’s terms names are able to ‘witness’, ‘cry out’, and ‘proclaim’ their interior and natural meaning. The reality behind the name is the *ḥaylā* (power or meaning) of the name. This *ḥaylā* proceeds along with the name just as the *ḥaylā* of the sun travels with light and heat. We will again come across the imagery of the meaning of names and the ‘rising up’ of the Sun in the course of our study.

CHAPTER IV

FROM HIS NAMES, WE LEARN ABOUT HIM

*HdF 52:1-3, 10, 14*¹

1

From God Himself, let us learn (about) God.
For just as from His names it is understood that He is
God,
And He is Just and also Good, so (too) His name
Father
Indicates that He is Begetter; for the very name of His
Fatherhood
Testifies about His Son; and though He is the Father
of (only) One
Through His love He is (the Father) of many.
Praises to His Grace!

2

He is the True Lord; see His servants standing²
He is the King of His 'possessions';³

¹ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.161-162, 163, 164.

² They stand constantly in front of their Master ministering. See *HdF 4:7* in Chapter I; Chapter III n 88.

³ *qenyānē* are creatures of God.

And because He is the Creator, see His creation
standing.⁴

And because He is the True Father⁵ He has the True
Son.⁶

But if His name of Father is merely a metaphor – God
forbid!

His related names⁷ would be abolished through
controversy.

Praises to the True⁸ (Name)!

3

Who can idly speak against⁹ that True Father:¹⁰
“He is unable to beget; He put on the name
Fatherhood as an appropriation”.
Even though it is Truth its flavour is preserved by
itself:
For (all) its salt, the fools have become insipid.
Who can undo¹¹ the name upon which stand
Our baptism and our remission?
Praises to Your remission!

⁴ 'exists', 'remains'. The Creator is the Owner or the Lord who protects and provides for the creatures. So the very existence of creatures is the result of the continuation of the love of the Creator (to the creatures) as the Lord (of these possessions). Here Ephrem is evidently Anti-Marcionite.

⁵ *abā d-quštā.*

⁶ *brā d-quštā.*

⁷ *šmāhē bnay zawgeh*. A mere metaphor is a borrowed name here.

⁸ *šrārā*: lit. 'truth'; but here it can mean either 'True (Name)' or 'True (Father)'. I have chosen 'True (Name)' because of the term *š'īlā* in the previous line. The contrast is clear also because of the adjectives *šarrīrā* in line 1, and *d-quštā* in lines 3 and 4.

⁹ 'deny', 'bring false accusation', etc. Is what follows from a real Neo-Arian adversary? See above translation of *HdF* 44:1 in Chapter III.

¹⁰ *abā d-quštā.*

¹¹ 'unfasten', 'break open', etc. Divine Name is the ground of our being.

10

Who would not believe that the Two Testaments
 Declare about the Father and the Son and the Spirit in
 every place!

They are not called with the name of 'made',
 'created' and 'formed'.¹²

There¹³ the names of creatures are not related to
 (Them).

Thus He willed and had written down; and because
 He is God

It is right that we believe Him.

Praises to His Lordship!

14

Why should we again make new something, other
 than

That Truth which is written for us? My brothers,
 The names which we have added¹⁴

Have become a pretext for the audacious,
 For all (kinds of) hateful additions.

(Once) you have added investigations, you have
 added disputes.

But (if) you had repeated what is written, you would
 have calmed what was ruffled.

Praises to Your clarity!

¹² These contrasts we pointed out in the first chapter.

¹³ That is in the Two Testaments.

¹⁴ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.140 n 6: 'Richtet sich das auch gegen das nizänische homoousios?' Beck's observation is correct since Ephrem is unlikely to favour such an unscriptural 'name'. The relevance of Ephrem's argument becomes clear only in the light of nascent Neo-Arianism. See, R.P. Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, (Oxford 1987), pp.9-10, 60-63, 70-71; M. Wiles, "Eunomius: hair-splitting dialectician", p.167; see above, Chapter II n 106.

The starting point of theological language and knowledge about God is not human search or wisdom. We learn about God from God Himself. Ephrem does not envisage knowledge of God that does not derive from God's own initiative. For him this is the real difference between two kinds of knowledge: our knowledge about God and our knowledge about fellow-creatures. The former is given or revealed, whereas the latter is our intellectual achievement. The former does in no way exclude or contradict our intellectual faculties. But these are all God-given and our existence and nature are free gifts flowing from the love of the Creator. Our existence is not our achievement. Ephrem identifies God and God's perfect and proper names. God's proper names are inseparable from God's *šrārā*; those who accept or reject those names are accepting or rejecting the *šrārā* itself. These names are revealed by God for us to learn about God. It is not that we apply our terms and language to describe God as far as God's proper names are concerned. They are given to us, revealed in salvation history. What is revealed in the Scripture is also reflected in Nature (eg. God as Good). Since there is perfect identity between God and God's proper names the Arians cannot argue that the Son is in any way less God, because the Father would not be God with such a Son. God's names reveal God and this warrants the validity of theological language for Ephrem. The meaning or reality (*šrārā*) behind the divine proper names is not proceeding from the names themselves, as if we first give some names to an unknown far away God and thus start speaking about God from our own resources. The divine proper names mean divine reality, divine presence and divine action; thus revelation and theophany are associated with divine proper names. If the name 'Father' is just a 'borrowed' (*š'īlā*) name (because the name 'Son' is borrowed as the

Arians argue!), Ephrem is ready to reject all proper names of God, in other words God Himself! Without the Son there is no Father. Along with the divine proper names like God, Just, Good, Father, Begetter, Son, Lord, King, Creator, there is the ever-present *šrārā* of all these. To deny these names one has to deny the *šrārā* first, as divine proper names are only revealed indications of what really exists behind them.

Rejection of one of the divine proper names means the rejection of all as we have seen already.¹⁵ Nor can anyone argue that the divine proper names are ‘borrowed’ from the realm of creatures. What lies behind Ephrem’s thought is only the radical monotheism of a Semitic mind which does not seek a God among fellow-creatures. The ontological chasm between creator, King/Lord and creature/possession is so great that only a revelation or theophany can form the basis of our God-talk. What lie behind the theophany is not ‘borrowed’ names, but proper names. Borrowed names of God are proper names of creatures, and if God has only borrowed names there is no God at all according to Ephrem’s logic. The plurality of divine proper names is not against an absolute monotheism so long as there is no ontological chasm between different proper names of God. Ephrem envisages a chasm between Creator and His creatures, but not within the Creator Himself. This is another case that proves that Ephrem’s system of thought is strictly consistent and has its own inner logic. There is no place for a God who has only names borrowed from the created world, since such a God ceases to be the

¹⁵ See the translation of *HdF* 44:3-4 in Chapter III.

Creator and the real God and is only a fiction of the human mind. The real God revealed His proper names and put on the names of creatures so that humanity may be able to put on divine names and divine glory. In stanza 3 we find the term *š'eltā* which means 'a loan' or 'something borrowed'. What is borrowed is the property of another and hence the person who borrowed it has only a temporal and limited ownership. His possession of the thing borrowed is dependant on his relationship with the real owner. But the Divine Fatherhood is not a matter of appropriation as the adversaries argue. No believer can do away with the Three Names, the foundation of baptism and forgiveness.

As Beck has noticed, it seems almost certain that Ephrem was not happy with those who added new names (like *homousios*). He does not find the need for going beyond the Truth (*šrārā*) written for us in the Scripture. The audacious have made a pretext, because of such additional names, to introduce all sorts of despicable additions. Increase of '*uqqābā*' even with good intentions means more controversy. But if we can repeat the names written in Scripture the confusion will cease since there is clarity in the names already given to us by God about Himself. Names like '*bīdā*', '*baryā*' and '*gbīlā*' are not kindred names of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but they apply to creatures, and thus in stanza 10 the idea of the ontological chasm is taken for granted. The names like Father, Lord, King, Creator and Son are God's kindred names in stanza 2; in the former stanza there are a few more: God, Just and Good. These are all proper names of God which are 'true', 'perfect and accurate'. The list elsewhere includes *Ītyā* and *Ītūtā* too. The chasm

between God's kindred names and our kindred names is ontological (stanza 10) and hence Ephrem warns against confusing between these two. In stanza 2 presumably he has the names Creator and Son primarily in mind (and hence against Marcionites, Arians, Jews, etc.). If God's proper names are not our kindred names (names equally applicable to Creator and creation alike) how and why should we believe them? If God has so willed and caused to be thus written, it is worthy of belief. The reason behind our faith and trust is God being God and that being revealed by God. If God's proper names are our kindred names the distinction or chasm between Creator and creature is no more and there is either pantheism or atheism, and hence the logic of the ontological chasm again. When we make new additions to the divine proper names there is no divine authority behind our additions. So Ephrem advises his audience in *HdF* 53:9¹⁶

Let us leave the interpretations (*puššāqē*)
 And let us search plainly and openly the names:¹⁷
 'Son' and 'creature'.

Here *puššāqē* means human interpretations and explanations based on the '*uqqābā* (scrutiny in the pejorative sense) of divine names, dragging them down to our side of the chasm. The names 'Son' (*brā*) and 'creature' (*brītā*) are chosen purposefully against the Arians who claimed Solomon's authority¹⁸ for identifying 'Son' with 'creature'.

¹⁶ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, p.166.

¹⁷ *šmāhē* can be translated here names = words.

¹⁸ *HdF* 53:10-14. On *Prov* 8:22 in Arian, Late-Arian, Neo-Arian disputes, see M.Simonetti, *Studi sull' arianesimo*, (Rome 1965), pp.9-87; A.Weber, *ARXH Ein Beitrag zu Christologie des Eusebius von*

With his characteristic humility and humour Ephrem writes in *HdF* 53:11¹⁹ From me, an unlearned,²⁰ let them listen for a while!

Since Solomon cannot be criticized or scriptural authority be denied, Ephrem finds an even more interesting solution as we read in:

***HdF* 53: 13-14²¹**

13

Now, count how many times He is called Son and
Child

And then, reckon how (often) He is called creature
too.

And when the words are counted the names²² which
are more (numerous)

Will convince the discerning:

For a proper name²³ will be repeated always;

But a surname²⁴ (will occur) twice (or) thrice at the
most.

Cäsarea, (Verlag Neue Stadt, n.p.1965), pp.122-158; Eunomius, *Liber Apologeticus* 26, 28 (R.P.Vaggione, *op.cit.*, pp.68-71; 74-75); R. Lorenz, *Arius judaizans? Untersuchungen zur dogmengeschichtlichen Einordnung des Arius*, (Göttingen 1979), pp. 67-72; see above, Chapter I n 9; see below nn 25, 108.

¹⁹ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, p.167.

²⁰ *menneh d-hedyōtūt(y)*. The Arian adversaries were 'learned', scholars, but Ephrem is 'unlearned'. Most probably this is an autobiographical note. Evidently Ephrem is unschooled; all his learning is personal and private, and not the result of formal training, systematic, Greek education. A similar personal remark we have in *HcH* 56:11.

²¹ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, p.167.

²² *šmāhē* and *qālē* are identical here. See above n 17.

²³ *šmā hattītā* is proper/real/exact name.

²⁴ *šmā d-kunnāyā* is only an appellation or title.

14

We have counted and have found that only in
a single proverb²⁵
Solomon called (Him) ‘creature’; we have reckoned
But did not finish, for the Father with all miracles,
The prophets with all mouths, the apostles with all
voices,
And demons with all torments,²⁶
Together proclaim Him (to be) the Son
Who would not believe and rebuke the contentious?

Ephrem's Arian adversaries can no longer reject such a convincing and surprisingly modern scientific approach to Scriptural texts: the Arians pick up a few isolated texts or words, neglecting many other passages, to support their arguments. An isolated occurrence is to be weighed against terms which turn up frequently, and this will persuade the *pārōšē*. Titles and appellations of God should not be mistaken for His proper names. God's proper names are repeated often in Scripture, but His appellations are not so. The divine proper names are clearly distinguished from

²⁵ Basil too gives the same reason in rejecting the Neo-Arian understanding of Prov 8:22. See M.V.Anastos, "Basil's KATA EYNOMIOY, a critical analysis", *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic: A Sixteen hundredth Anniversary Symposium, Part I*, P.J. Fedwick, ed., (Toronto 1981), p.102; A. Meredith, "Proverbes viii.22 chez Origène, Athanase, Basile et Grégoire de Nysse", *Politique et théologie chez Athanase d'Alexandrie, Actes du colloque de Chantilly, 23-25 septembre 1973*, C. Kannengiesser, ed., (Théologie historique 27, Paris 1974), pp.349-357. See nn 18 and 108 in the present Chapter.

²⁶ Ephrem has in mind the torments which Jesus' name, voice, very presence or sight from afar, caused to the demons. In *Mt* 8:29, *Mk* 1:24, 3:11 and *Lk* 4:41, it is the demons who are tormented though the verb *ngad* does not occur in these texts.

divine titles borrowed from us creatures and put on for a pedagogical and soteriological purpose. The difference between name (*šmā*) and title (*kunnāyā*) is clear in Ephrem's mind: Every name is a title; but every title is not a name. Often Ephrem uses these two terms interchangeably; but on closer analysis the distinction is clear even though he does not make this distinction explicit unless it is necessary. We will come across such texts later. Ephrem is never tired of repeating certain favourite divine appellations to prove his argument, as illustrated in:

*HdF 54: 8*²⁷

Indeed it is written that the Good Lord 'repented',²⁸
and was 'weary'.²⁹
For He put on our weakness; but also He clothed us
again³⁰
With the names of His Majesty. The foolish saw what
is ours
And supposed that something which is from us, is His
own!
And they were reprov'd, and they did not perceive
That in that case, even what is His own³¹
We should think to be ours!

²⁷ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.169. Basil's argument against Eunomius distinguishes between the metaphorical and the literal in Scriptural language. But, like Ephrem, Basil too refers to the same biblical texts: God slept, was angry, etc. M.V. Anastos, "Basil's KATA EYNOMIOY", p.105. See the translation of *HdF* 31:1-11 and 44:1-2 in Chapter III.

²⁸ See *HdF* 44:2; Gen 6:6.

²⁹ See *HdF* 31:4, 8; Is 1:14, 7:13; Jn 4:6.

³⁰ *lan hpak albeš*: 'He clothed us in return'. But 'He clothed us again' if we take *hpak* used with adverbial force. See J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.105.

³¹ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.146 n 15: 'D.h. seine göttlichen Eigenschaften'.

God put on human names (words/language) to teach us through our own language, and to save us. For God it is condescension to our weak and childish level. But God's descent is to make our ascent without destroying human freedom. He has clothed our weakness in order to clothe us again. If God put on our weakness He did not come down without a purpose: to clothe us with the names of divine majesty. Thus the desire of Adam to become like God finds fulfilment because of God's condescending Goodness.³² This descent of God into our weak language and names should not be misunderstood. The 'foolish ones'³³ saw that God too is in our weak language and hence suppose that God is like us in weakness. They saw only what He borrowed from us and put on Himself for our benefit; they failed to detect our names which are only 'borrowed' (*š'īlē*) for Him. They thought it is His proper names arising from His 'reality' (*šrārā*). They do not perceive that they are rebuked by their own stand-point. If what He borrowed from us was His *šrārā* then even His *šrārā* should be our *šrārā* and He is no more God! Thus the 'foolish' are really *kāpōrē* because by denying the True Name (Son), they deny the One Name (God). Though Ephrem does not explain all this in explicit terms, his intention is clear. Ephrem's whole argument against the Arians is essentially this: Their method of 'scrutiny' (*'uqqābā*) is wrong since it presumes to bring down the *šrārā* of God to a human level and thereby they deny that divine *šrārā* itself. The silence of Abraham³⁴ is the mark of his faith. Faith is based on God's trustworthiness. Since there is perfect identification between God and God's proper names, *'uqqābā* is disbelief as it is a failure to take God on His own

³² See S. Brock, "Clothing metaphors", pp.11-40.

³³ As we saw in Chapter II *saklē* and *pārōsē* are in contrast.

³⁴ *HdF* 56.

terms. In *HdF* 57 Ephrem brings in an analogy³⁵ to convince the Arians: our memory can hold many names of creatures and nobody can exactly explore the inside of memory as the human mind needs no place to store the names. Thus the fact that “in the True Father, in Him is the True Son”³⁶ is beyond our exploration and scrutiny. But ‘they (the Arians) called Him a fellow-servant’,³⁷ complains Ephrem.

REVEALED AND SELF-REVEALING NAMES ARE NOT FOR SCRUTINY

HdF 59:5, 7³⁸

5

Who is ignorant that (Scripture)³⁹ reckoned in a series
And counted in an ‘order’ the Threefold Names
Of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, and it is right
that, just as
It has reckoned Their names, It should reveal Their
natures!

³⁵ In *HdF* 31:1 and 57 Ephrem anticipates Augustine as Beck notes; See E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, p.51.

³⁶ *HdF* 57:4. *abā d-quštā* and *brā d-quštā* again shows that *šrārā* of the Son cannot be denied without denying the *šrārā* of the Father.

³⁷ *HdF* 58:10.

³⁸ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, pp.183, 184. In *HdF* 59:5 Ephrem gives us a paraphrase of the Neo-Arian views. In the first part of this stanza, the term *taxis* is deliberately mentioned (in its Syriacized form) and the Neo-Arian theory on name and nature is indicated. The second part of the stanza is Ephrem’s position against his Neo-Arian adversaries. For Basil’s criticism of Eunomian use of the term *taxis*, see M.V. Anastos, Basil’s *KATA EYNOMIOY*, pp.88, 112-113. We shall come across Ephrem’s repeated use of the term *tukkāsā* in the Trinitarian context; see below, n 60; *SdF* II:609-612.

³⁹ See E. Beck, *CSCO* 155 *Syr* 74, p.158 n 7. As it is clear from *HdF* 59:4, Ephrem identifies the Scripture with the Finger or Hand behind the Scripture.

Now if it is written, let them read; but if it is not
 written, let them confess
 That Their nature is hidden.

7

Therefore, without argument accept everything
 That is written and spoken, names and appellations:
 The sum total⁴⁰ He willed to set⁴¹ for the life of
 humanity.

It is not for His scrutiny, nor should we
 Scrutinize in dispute over Their nature,
 But so that we should recognize how great
 Their love, is!

The Threefold names are reckoned as a series in a specific order. This is what we find in Scripture and it is invoked in the same order in our baptism. The invocation of Their very names is in fact the revelation of ‘Their natures’. But this is not to say that we have Their ‘natures’ in our grip. Revelation of nature through names does not mean that by means of names we can take hold of nature. Here the adversaries are Neo-Arians. In stanza 5 the term *kyānayhōn* is used because Ephrem is speaking about ‘Their names’ (*šmāhayhōn*). There is a ‘nature’ behind each of the Trinitarian names and that nature is specific to each name. Evidently the specific natures of the three persons of the Trinity and their commonly shared divinity are differentiated. Here Ephrem may use the term nature for both without any confusion. But the reader should be very alert to follow the

⁴⁰ *mlō’ā* means fullness, quantity, volume, amount, abundance, sum, gain, profit, matter, material, etc.

⁴¹ Set down in writing.

logic of Ephrem in using the same term for two things. In this particular context Ephrem does not seem to distinguish between *kyānā* and *qnōmā* because he does not and cannot think of a radical separation between both. Ephrem cannot speculate about the existence of *qnōmā* without *kyānā* and vice versa. He thinks in concrete rather than in abstract terms since he thinks as a Semite. Here we find how fluid his theological terms can be at times and how cautious one should be: one should not take Ephrem out of his time or context and impose any later ‘systematic’ meaning.

The Three names involve the theophany of Their specific natures. We can read about this theophany (that is Their ‘natures’ in Their ‘names’) in Scripture. But ‘Their Nature’ (*kyānhōn*) is not written down and hence we should confess that ‘Their Nature’ is ‘hidden’ (beyond the ontological chasm). The distinction between *kyānayhōn* and *kyānhōn* in stanza 5 must not be forgotten in interpreting the text as it provides another example of the subtlety of Ephrem’s thought and the fluidity of his terms. Corresponding to the ‘nature’ (*kyānā*) of the Father, Son and Spirit there is the ‘name’ (*šmā*) which serves as the indication of *qnōmā*. If each of these names does not have a specific nature or identity, (the reason behind the *qnōmā*!) behind them, Their names would not have been written down for us. One should not confuse Their names and Their natures with Their Name and Their Nature. Here Ephrem is accommodating his Trinitarian views in the context of biblical monotheism. Names and titles are given in the Scripture, and that is what God willed for our salvation; they are not for prying and controversy. Their *kyānā* is not ours to scrutinize; but the great love behind them is clear without scrutiny and this is the purpose behind the theophany of

divine names. The names of the Father, the Son and the Spirit have Their own natures, but also The Nature. Here the natures mean what is behind each of the Three Names; otherwise these names would not mean anything. The Threefold Names are in fact the revelation of Threefold Natures; through the confession of the Three Names we recognize the Threefold Natures and we only have access to the Three Names in the Scripture. Going beyond the Names to scrutinize the Natures is impossible as Their Nature is 'hidden'. In Their Names They are revealed; in Their Nature They are hidden. This is not to deny the existence of Their natures in so far as they are revealed in and through the Three Names. It is noteworthy that Ephrem speaks of 'natures' and the Nature in the context of the Threefold Names, without implying any philosophical meaning for the term *kyānā*.

THE TRUE FATHER

HdF 60:2⁴²

Indeed why that True Father⁴³ was compelled -
 If He did not beget a Son -
 To use the name 'Father' and 'Son'?

Ephrem stated that there is 'nature' behind each of the Trinitarian names. He rules out the possibility of the Father being Father (and God) if He is not 'True Father' (*abā d-quštā*). Thus Arianism is nothing other than plain godlessness, and its followers are in practice *kāpōrē* in Ephrem's opinion. If the Son is not the true Son (*brā d-lā šarrīr*) why should God be there as one pretending to be the Father (*abā š'ilā*)? Only the True Son has the True Father and vice versa.

⁴² *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, p.185.

⁴³ *abā d-quštā* is used in contrast with *abā d-š'ilā*; see *HdF* 60: 4.

God trusts that our children are ours; likewise He demands our trust about God too. God showed this trust on many occasions in salvation history. Human names given by human beings were pleasing to God; He trusted us (our names). So we also have to trust His names (Him). This concept of trusting in the names (the one behind the names, the one whose actions reveal the reasons behind the names) is typically biblical as far as Ephrem is concerned.⁴⁴ The names which Leah and Rachel gave to their children were pleasing to God. When Adam the servant gave the names of the animals, the Creator, Lord of All, was pleased with those names.⁴⁵ Here Adam is only the servant (*'abdā*) and for the Lord of All it is a great condescension because the Lord who created everything gave it all to Adam to name (that is the servant is made the lord and king over everything he is allowed to give names) and the Lord was happy with all the names which Adam gave. But there is a sharp contrast between the attitude of the Lord of All and the children of Adam towards each other. The Lord of All is always ready to take delight in the names of the children of Adam or even the names of animals. The Lord of All is well-pleased with the servant (humanity) as regards name-giving. Here name-giving also symbolizes the stewardship of human beings over the universe created and given to us by God though we are only servants and fellow-creatures. The concept of all creation as *qenyānē* of the Lord is implied here. But the children of Adam are unabashed 'in waging a war of disputations against the name of the Son proclaimed by God in their ears'.⁴⁶ This public proclamation was made during the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus.

⁴⁴ *Gen* 29:32-30:24; see *HdF* 60:7.

⁴⁵ See *HdF* 62: 2.

⁴⁶ See *HdF* 62: 2 .

EVEN THE DEMONS CONFESS THE TRUE NAME TO REPROVE THE SCRIBES

*HdF 60:8-11*⁴⁷

8

The All-Knowing-Lord asked the demon

What his name, was.⁴⁸

Nor did He falsify the name of the unclean demon,

Just as even the demons did not falsify His name.

The 'scribes' who called Our Saviour

'A creature', were put to shame, for the demon
reproved them

That He is the Son of God.⁴⁹

9

From and through himself,⁵⁰ the Legion learnt that
just as

His name agrees with 'legion' in meaning.

So he shouted that he perceived that He was the Son
of God,

For His name agreed with His Father.

Now if the unclean name of the Evil (one)

Our adversary matches its evil (state)

How much more, indeed, (the name) of Our God!

⁴⁷ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.187.

⁴⁸ *aykan hū*. See *Mt* 5: 8-9; *Lk* 8: 30. Jesus' question is *aykannā šmāk* (*Mt*) or *man šmak* (*Lk*) as if there is only one demon involved.

⁴⁹ *Mk* 5:7; *Lk* 8:28. See above n 26.

⁵⁰ *menne(h) u-be(h)*.

10

For who would compare⁵¹ the names of the Holy One
Who resembles with Himself in everything: In (the
name of) *Ītyā*⁵² to His *Ītūtā*,
In (the name of) Just to His Justice; in (the name of)
Good to His Grace.
In these (names) He agrees and how (can) His
Fatherhood be different?⁵³
For He is not agreeing with Himself, if He does not
have the Begotten,
The Glorious (One) who is from His womb.⁵⁴

11

Who would not rejoice! For if these appellations
 Agree with them: Adam (agreeing) with soil⁵⁵
 Eve with life;⁵⁶ Peleg with division,⁵⁷
 And Babel with confusion.⁵⁸
 Since we have arrived at confusion,⁵⁹ let us end the
 confusion!
 (Then) receive in order⁶⁰ the Threefold Names.

⁵¹ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.162: ‘vergleichend erklären’ as in *HdF* 55: 1.

⁵² E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.162: 'Seienden'; idem, *Die Theologie*, pp.11 f.

⁵³ lit. 'divided'.

⁵⁴ 'ubbā of the Father. *Jn* 1:18; *CDiat* 2:5; H.J.W. Drijvers, “The 19th Ode of Solomon: its interpretation and place in Syrian Christianity”, *JTS n.s.* 31 (1980), pp.337-355.

⁵⁵ Or 'earth'; *Gen* 2:7.

⁵⁶ Or ‘living’. Aphrahat too shares this idea in *Dem* 22 (*PS I* 1017, 3-5).

⁵⁷ *Gen* 10:25.

⁵⁸ *Gen* 11: 9.

⁵⁹ *bulbālā*. Ephrem has in mind the confusion of Babel as well as the confusion of Arianism! This seems to be another autobiographical remark indicating the linguistic barrier between Ephrem and Arian propagandists. See *HdF* 60:12.

⁶⁰ *b-tukkāsā* is contrast with *bulbālā*. See above n 38.

The Omniscient Lord asked 'the demon' about 'his' name as if He were doubly ignorant: first of all Jesus was ignorant of the name of those demons; secondly Jesus thought that there was only one demon possessing the sick man and hence He asked about 'his name' instead of 'their name'. This sort of ignorance from the part of the Lord who knows everything is because of Jesus' corporeality, and there is no contradiction at all in Ephrem's thought about the ignorance of the Omniscient. The ignorance of Jesus is a positive element in Ephrem's concept of the incarnation as we learn from *HdA* 15:18-31.⁶¹ It is in fact the absence of ignorance in Jesus that would cause scandal to Ephrem as it would rule out the limitations of Jesus' corporeality and hence the incarnation as well. Once the demons revealed their name as 'legion' Jesus accepted it as they said. He did not hold their name as false (*daggel*) or deny it. Nor did the demons deny His name. They proclaimed it as it was known to them and hence the 'scribes' are put to shame; this nickname 'scribes' for the Arians is not without reason in Ephrem's mind! The 'scribes' of Jesus' days were put to shame when the demons confessed His true name (Son of God). So the Arians can learn about Jesus from the very mouth of those demons! The confession of Jesus' name as the Son of God, even by the demons, is a fitting reproof to anyone (that is a contemporary Arian) who pretends to falsify that name. The name 'legion' agreed with the reality behind it: a 'legion' of demons possessed the man (and not just one unclean spirit as Jesus thought!). The demons knew the reality behind their name as 'legion'. So they immediately understood that Jesus' name (Son) agreed with God (His Father). Ephrem does not say how the demons knew the name of Jesus as the Son of God; perhaps he

⁶¹ Ephrem explores this concept further in *HdF* 77-79; see *HdF* 77:23-25,30; E.Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.81-82.

assumes that they too heard the 'resounding voice' of the proclamation by the Father at Jordan! Even they realize that the Son of God will only be a creature if the Father is a creature. The unclean name of the Evil (one) is perfectly in agreement with the underlying state of evil. If this is so with the unclean name of the Evil (one), the name of our God should all the more be in harmony with His reality. The relation between name and reality is not understood here with any particular philosophical speculation. It is precisely because of this that Ephrem had to clarify his own stand with an apparent apology as we shall see later in the Appendix.

Ephrem is not very happy with the contrast (of reality) and the comparison (of name) given above by himself: nobody can compare the names of the Holy One because there is only one possibility, to compare God with God, because God agrees with God alone. Here again Ephrem's idea of the ontological chasm is only a corollary of the Semitic concept of God being absolutely unique. If God is absolutely unique and also the Creator there is no way we can find an exact comparison with any other reality. This agreement of God with Himself is so perfect and absolute that there is no exact and accurate bridge between our human language and His divine reality. In other words, anyone who speaks about God has to keep in mind the ever-present reality of the ontological chasm. Language and understanding go so far as the extremity of the boundary and there come to a dead end. So there is a dynamic tension between ordinary human language and theological language. The moment we try to substitute one with the other we 'go astray' from the 'royal highway'. Theological language is human language but not all human language is theological. If one supposes that there is a perfect identity between these two, then one has taken the

wrong track. God has put on human language for our benefit, because of our weakness. If God has crossed over to our side of the chasm we cannot on the other hand presume to have God entirely and exclusively in our grip. In our God-talk there are three stages:

- (1) God beyond the chasm.
- (2) God on our side of the chasm.
- (3) God who is both beyond, far away, and on our side, near.

These three stages make our theological language both valid and invalid. In so far as we do not confuse or substitute one stage for another our theological language is valid, necessary and helpful. But all our knowledge about God is based on the second stage which necessarily involves the third stage. Ultimately the first stage is without comparison, and so silence is more eloquent than speech.⁶² Theological language is concerning second and third stages, never neglecting the chasm involved; nor can we ignore the first stage though our language and the eye of our thought are unable to reach that absolute hiddenness. Ephrem's theological procedure of 'never forgetting the ontological chasm' is his much repeated answer to Neo-Arianism.⁶³

As we have pointed out, the incomparability of God results from the fact that there is only One God and no other. The absolute uniqueness of God - being beyond the ontological chasm - has no parallel and this is the natural consequence of the monotheistic view of God as the Creator. God alone is *Ītyā* because of His *Ītūtā*; *kēnā* because of His

⁶² See above Chapter II.

⁶³ See above Chapter II.

kēnūtā; *ṭābā* because of His *ṭaybūtā*. How the name *abā* can be an exception, asks Ephrem in stanza 10. 'Fatherhood' (*abāhūtā*) involves two names - Father and Son (*brā*) - unlike other divine realities. What is known to us are the divine proper names such as *Ītyā*, Just, Good, Father (with Son), and not the divine realities behind them. If God is Father and still without the Son there is a contradiction within God and thus it is *kāpōrūtā* (denial) of God. The uniqueness of God does not rule out the possibility of speaking about God in human language which He put on. But once we presume to forget the ontological chasm our language ceases to be theological. God's proper names should be understood as perfectly in agreement with God's reality, but without offering us a 'definition' of reality.

Ephrem brings in a few examples in stanza 11 to prove that even human names agree with the realities behind them. His play on words cannot be brought out in translation. *Adam* is from '*adamtā*'; the name *Eve* (*ḥawā*) is from *ḥayūtā*; *Peleg* is in harmony with *palgūtā*; the name *Babel* is because of *bulbālā*. All these examples are biblical and accepted even by Arians. So the 'ordering' (*tukkāsā*) of the Three Names must also be accepted (as it is revealed in the Scripture and is also the foundation for baptism). Names agree with what they are. If there is no agreement and relationship between name and reality what is the difference between one name and other name? But names are only secondary to realities, provided the names are not borrowed. All the above given realities are primary and fundamental and hence names explain the realities. But since the names are rooted in the realities, the realities are in a sense represented, revealed, explained in and through the names. Ultimately even proper names are appellations of the realities behind them. The

agreement of appellations (*kunnāyē*) with what they are is clear from stanzas 9-11. The term *šmāhē* in stanza 10 is used to describe God's (proper) names; but in stanza 11 *kunnāyē* too stands for (proper) names. As we have already noted Ephrem uses these two terms interchangeably, but still keeping the clear distinction intact.⁶⁴ Usually *kunnāyā* is 'title' or 'appellation'; but since every *šmā* is a *kunnāyā* in Ephrem's understanding, he does not reserve the term *kunnāyā* only for appellations as such.

NO CONFUSION BETWEEN THE NAMES 'SON' AND 'CREATURE'

HdF 61:3-4, 6-9⁶⁵

3

A word having power in itself⁶⁶ (is) also unwilling to
be silent

For it is not willing to defraud:⁶⁷

For if the name of the Son is related⁶⁸ to the creatures,
Then the name of 'creatures' is also related to the
'Creator';

But if the name of 'creatures' is alien to the Creator,
Thus it is also alien to the Son of the Creator.

⁶⁴ See Chapter III nn 40-41, 64-65; nn 17, 22-24, 113 in our present chapter; nn 2, 38, 53 in Chapter V; see also, E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, p.66.

⁶⁵ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, pp.188-190.

⁶⁶ E. Beck, *CSCO* 155 Syr 74, p. 164: 'Ein Wort das seine (Beweis) kraft in sich hat...' ; J.B. Morris, *Select Works of S.Ephraim the Syrian*, (Oxford 1897), p.307: 'Any word with a proper meaning in it...'.
⁶⁷ *l-meṭlam*: to oppress, cheat, deal falsely, treat wrongly or unjustly: to withhold that which is due to someone, deny, etc. See, J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.175.

⁶⁸ 'a kindred'.

4

Anything which happens to the nature of a Begetter
 Can also, happen to the Begotten⁶⁹ of the Begetter.
 Radiant is the Ray because its Begetter is Radiant.
 It can neither be cut off - because it is alike its root;
 Nor confined - because it is bound through its
 appellation.

To Him is He like in everything.

6

Who would not marvel at two roots,⁷⁰
 Which lost their natures and changed their names!⁷¹
 Both were hidden from their fruits:
 The noble root (has) a slavish fruit,
 And the slavish tree (has) a majestic produce
 While obscuring the blossom!

7

Its 'weapon' lies in it's very self,⁷²
 For if the True Son⁷³ is not considered the Begotten,

Then also the servant should not be reckoned a
 creature.⁷⁴

For it is one of two things: Either the two sides stand,
 Each one in its (own) integrity,⁷⁵

✧

⁶⁹ E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.164: 'dem Erzeugnis'. Though *yaldā* can mean 'the Begotten' or 'the process of begetting', here the former makes better sense.

⁷⁰ That is 'Creator' and 'creature'.

⁷¹ in their fruits.

⁷² If the critics argue like that (see stanza 6), now comes Ephrem's attack using the same weapon!

⁷³ *brā d-quštā*.

⁷⁴ *tuqqānā* is 'making', 'a thing made', etc.

Or they have undergone change.
Either their names are proved true
Or their natures have gone astray.

8

Who would not ask the question that if the name of
the Son

Is 'creature' when it is scrutinized, then also
'creature'

Is 'begotten' in inquiry and is therefore unable
To match its name to itself!

For it has left its (own) reality and fled
Towards the 'begotten', just as the name of the 'Son'
Has attached itself to 'creatures'.

9

Therefore 'this creature' is no longer like a creature,
Just as also, the begotten is no longer like the Son;
Therefore confusion is increased. But if the True
Son⁷⁶

Put off and lost His name, God forbid and let it not
be!

Who can invoke His names justly,
For they have transgressed propriety!

HdF 62: 3-15⁷⁷

3

Our Lord is compared to the Way,⁷⁸ for He has led us
to His Father.

⁷⁵ 'stability, steadfastness, excellent fashioning', etc. See J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.619.

⁷⁶ *brā d-quštā*.

⁷⁷ CSCO 154 Syr 73, pp.192-194.

⁷⁸ *Jn* 14:6.

And again, He is compared to the Door⁷⁹ for He has
 brought us to His Kingdom.
 And also, they have compared Him to the Lamb,⁸⁰
 for He was slain for our atonement.
 And what He was called⁸¹ also agreed with His acts
 of redemption.⁸²
 How much more fitting and appropriate, also His
 name to His Begetter;
 For if He is Son, He is (also) the Begotten.

4

From and through the (very) name its power can be
 experienced,⁸³
 For there is a name which is able to explain itself to
 us.
 ‘The servant’ (‘*abdā*’) (proclaims) its Maker (‘*abōdā*’);
 ‘the creature’ its Creator;
 ‘The (earth)-formed’ (‘*gbīlā*’) its Potter (*gābōlā*), and
 the Begotten, the Begetter.
 They proclaim without controversy; it (serves as) the
 armour
 Which is never going to be conquered in dispute.

⁷⁹ *Jn* 10: 9.

⁸⁰ *Is* 53: 7, *Jn* 1: 29.

⁸¹ *Mt* 1: 21 gives the reason behind the name ‘Jesus’.

⁸² Ms A has *l-puqdānaw(hy)*; B gives *l-purqānaw(hy)*. Beck follows B and points out the more or less equal meaning of A. See E.Beck, *CSCO* 155 *Syr* 74, p.167 n 8. The verb *pqad* in *Mt* 10:5 and *l-mepqad* in *Mt* 11:1 may be the reason behind the reading in A (if A is not a scribal mistake). The disciples are sent out in Jesus’ name to preach, teach and to heal. Thus, the ‘acts of redemption’ are in and through Jesus’ name. See above n 81.

⁸³ ‘tasted’.

5

From some confusion (a name) is reproved, in that it
is a perversion.

But behold, (here) every name is clear and agreeing
with its (own) root.

‘The servant’, to ‘the Maker’, ‘creature’, to ‘the
Creator’

And ‘Begotten’ to ‘the Begetter’. Indeed, is the name
of every thing else

Established and (only) that name Son lost?

It is not lost - because the lost

Were found by Him and returned.

6

It is clear in every respect: ⁸⁴

Just as ‘creature’ is a creature without any
controversy,

In name and in reality, ⁸⁵

It is required by propriety, ⁸⁶

That likewise the Son is the Son,

Being the Son both in name and in reality.

But if His name is false,

(Then) the names of everything have lied in every
respect.

7

Who is called Begotten when His Begetting does not
exist?

Then the names of Begotten and His Begetter would
be feigned. ⁸⁷

⁸⁴ lit. ‘From it and through it and about it’.

⁸⁵ *ba-šmā w-ba-šrārā*.

⁸⁶ demanding what is due, right and just.

⁸⁷ ‘borrowed’.

For the name 'Father' would contradict itself.⁸⁸
 So too 'Son' in His (own) generation!
 The Fruit and its Tree are not at odds,
 For Their names proclaim the taste of truth.⁸⁹

8

Who can sense 'creature' /servant ('*abdā*) in the name
'Begotten'
 And in the name 'Son', 'creature'?
 From and through the (very name) of the fruit
 Its taste can be understood.
 But if the taste of bitter (fruit) is sweet -
 Then the names of everything are understood in the
opposite (sense).
 But who can turn upside down the names of the Lord
of all?

9

Though human beings receive names through grace
 (Nevertheless) they do not lose their natures through
the appellation.
 They are (still) clad with the names proper to
humanity.
 And their (own) name is a crucible for them:
 For if the Son is a creature/servant
 He is found to be our fellow-servant.
 But if Son, He is the Lord, He is truly⁹⁰ our God.

⁸⁸ *plīgā* means 'divided'.

⁸⁹ 'true taste'; more or less similar expression in stanzas 4,8,11.

⁹⁰ *b-quštā*.

10

Who would not marvel at this: If even His Son is a
creature/servant
Then the womb of His Begetter will have made Him a
fellow-servant for all,
And He would be found to be more honoured in the
birth from Mary,
Which (indeed) made Him to be a true Brother to
humanity,
Than from the womb which (allegedly) made Him
An ordinary fellow-servant to reptiles and animals!

11

Who can hold to be false the names of the True
(Son)?⁹¹

Hear in His name His reality:⁹²

If the name ‘Son’ and ‘Begotten’ are found to be not
true,
Then even the name of creatures would be false.
But if every (other) name is found true, palatable and
sound,
And (only) the name ‘Son’ is tasteless,
(Then) it is we who have become tasteless,⁹³
Because we deprived it⁹⁴ (of taste).⁹⁵

⁹¹ *šmāhaw(hy) d-šarrirā.*

⁹² *śrārēh*.

⁹³ 'senseless', 'foolish'.

⁹⁴ That is 'the name Son'.

⁹⁵ 'meaning'.

12

But who can deprive of taste⁹⁶ the proper names⁹⁷
Of the Father and the Son and the Spirit,
Through whom the senseless scribes⁹⁸ obtained sense.
In the case of everything that exists it is possible
That its intensity⁹⁹ can become insipid through
mixing;
For (the names) of the Father, Son and Spirit,
Alone are true,¹⁰⁰ since Their might is not related to
mixing.

13

Who can baptize with borrowed names?
Who can confess borrowed names?
We ourselves are (the ones) divided over the Truth
Whose power can never be separated;
For He is the Father whose love is not cut off from
His Begotten.
Who can tear asunder the Harmonious Names!

14

Who would not scoff, if the Creator
Exalted His creatures more than Himself!
Because their names are equal, whereas the name of
the Father is contradictory!

⁹⁶ 'meaning'.

⁹⁷ *śmāhē ḥattūtē* can be taken as ‘the names of the True (Ones)’ as Beck has translated. But see the next stanza.

⁹⁸ We can read *sāprē* (scribes) or *sēprē* (Books).

⁹⁹ 'might', 'vehemence', etc.

¹⁰⁰ *ḥattifīn*. See above n 97.

Everyone is clad with his (own) names;
 But only the Father and the Son are stripped of Their
 names!
 They have falsified every name in every respect!

15

Who would yield both (points) to the audacious
 (Allowing) him to go as he wishes?
 Listen to his device, and believe firmly the names of
 creatures.

But he has turned round and cast away
 The names of the 'Begotten' and 'His Begetter'.
 With his (own) will, bind him to his dispute.
 Whichever way he is turned confine him with Truth.

The 'power' (*ḥaylā*) of a word/name (*meltā*) is not exactly 'the meaning', though 'meaning' is there with the *ḥaylā*. 'Meaning' is only the result of the inherent *ḥaylā*. The *ḥaylā* is that which underlies even the very meaning itself. The *ḥaylā* goes out with meaningful words as it cannot remain silent; otherwise it will be cheating itself. Here *ḥaylā* means an existential relationship between a word and reality behind the word. The meaning arises from the reality and becomes inseparably connected with the word. There is a gradual unfolding of reality and meaning in and through the word. The reality lies behind as the unseen root; the meaning sprouts forth as the visible shoot. The outer layer is the word, and the word serves as a transparent vehicle of meaning though the reality itself is beyond this transparency. This happens only with those words which have a *ḥaylā* within them because of their relationship with the reality. The meaning and *ḥaylā* behind the meaning connect such words with realities. There is a trinity of revelation here: words

(names) which we utter and hear; the meaning and *ḥaylā* behind the meaning we understand without any special scrutiny; and the reality (*šrārā*) which remains 'hidden' (*kasyā*). The threefold revelation involves a threefold hiddenness as well. A word is 'revealed' (*galyā*); it is audible to the ears and perceptible to the intellect. But the meaning is both revealed and hidden (*galyā w-kasyā*); it is to be interpreted correctly and so open and closed; reality is hidden (*kasyā*). Meaning (and the *ḥaylā* behind the meaning) remain the link between fully hidden (reality) and the fully revealed (word/name). Since a word, if it has an indwelling *ḥaylā*, is the revealed dimension of reality, it cannot be silent about reality. If it is silent it ceases to be a meaningful word,¹⁰¹ a word having *ḥaylā*. Though the word or name is the revealed and revealing dimension of some reality, our intellect may not be able to grasp it fully; nor does this fact exclude a 'measured' or well-balanced intellectual scrutiny and study. Unfortunately Ephrem has been pictured as 'anti-intellectual' by some who try to interpret his thought in terms of non-Ephremic logic.¹⁰² Ephrem's is a Semitic mind and his logic typically oriental. An opposition between 'reason' and 'faith' is not a real one for Ephrem; such an opposition should not be 'imposed' upon him by modern writers because it is entirely extraneous to his mind and logic.

¹⁰¹ Name is meaningful in itself; but not so an 'empty name'.

¹⁰² P. Bruns, "Arius hellenizans?", p.41; idem, *Das Christusbild*, pp.159-160;182-183. Bruns' complaint is that one cannot find a difference between *sentire* and *intelligere* in early Syriac theology. But should one look for such a non-Semitic distinction in a Semitic world? Perhaps early Syriac theology can be better understood without the help of a Graeco-Latin perspective. This is not to deny any influence or contact with the Greek world. See T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, pp.537-539.

In *HdF* 61:3 (with some implicit reference in *HdF* 52: 1-2, 10, 53: 9, 13-14) Ephrem alludes to some Syriac-speaking Arians whose argument centred on the terms *brā* and *berytā* supposedly being etymologically related: In Syriac the noun *brā* means 'son'; but the verb *brā* means 'to create', as in *Gen* 1:1. The past participle *brē* (in Syriac distinguished from *brā* only in reading since the vowel signs were not yet invented) means 'something created'. So it was not difficult for his Arian adversaries to claim an etymological connection between *brā* (Son) and *brītā* (creation) in support of their views. Perhaps these adversaries were also referring to the use of *brā* in *Gen* 1:1 in the light of *Prov* 8:22. Ephrem argues that if *brā* (Son) is 'related' to *berytā* (creatures) one can also say that it is 'related' to *bārōyā* (Creator), conceding no distinction between creatures and the Creator. The relationship hinted at here is that of kinship; even the adversaries cannot argue that there is no difference between Creator and creature. The Son of the Creator has the same relationship as that of the Creator as far as the creatures are concerned. Likeness of the Begotten to the Begetter is a perfect likeness in everything as the Son shares in the nature of God. No creature 'shares in' the nature of God. If the name *brā* is related (*aḥyānā*) to *berytā* then both names are cheating themselves about their transparent meaning, which they cannot do as they are 'meaningful words'. It goes without saying that 'name' is depicting and representing the *qnōmā* - the identity and the concrete manifestation of the reality - here.

The nature (*kyānā*) of a begetter (*yālōdā*) is the deciding factor as regards his begotten (*yaldā*). The qualities of the begetter are the qualities of the begotten. There are two inseparable links: generation (from the Father) and the

appellation (Son). The critics cannot ignore the fact that Son (*brā*) is the begotten (*yaldā*) and instead pretend that there is an etymological link between the names *brā* and *berytā*. The creatures share neither the nature nor the name of God, whereas the Son shares both. But Ephrem is not content and he goes on to rebut a hypothetical (or real) adversary: What if these two roots have lost their ‘natures’ (*kyānē*) and changed their ‘names’ (*šmāhē*)? The picture implied here is the possibility of the Creator begetting a creature, the Son (of God), obscuring the real nature and real name.¹⁰³ If the Creator begets a creature both of them have lost their own natures, and by losing their natures, also their own names, and there is nothing more to speak about as we have to look for names and natures that simply do not exist in reality.

Ephrem is never content with just indicating the illogical position of the adversary and so we find a secondary argument. If the situation of Creator and creatures losing their natures and names seems possible to anyone, the same argument is turned against him. If the ‘True Son’ (*brā d-quštā*) is not Begotten what about the ‘*abdā* (creature/servant) who ceases to be a *tuqqānā* (creature/thing made)? Not even the Arians can argue that creature is not a creature or that Creator is not Creator because both share the

¹⁰³ *HdF* 61:6 can be understood slightly differently and it is likely that Ephrem intended this twofold meaning: God sent the Son who is Begotten and we who are creatures are made sons. If one thinks that God lost His *kyānā* and His ‘name’, underwent a change in the economy of salvation, or we lost our *kyānā* and name creatures because of redemption, he is entirely wrong. Divine proper names are never ‘put on’ or ‘put off’.

same nature and same name. We have no difficulty in detecting the chasm between the natures (and names) of both creatures and their Creator. So concludes Ephrem: Either Creator and creatures stand as they are, or they have both undergone a change, contradicting their *kyānē* and their *šmāhē*. If they contradict their *kyānē* and their *šmāhē*, then the very names *bārōyā* and *beryātā* become silent (without having *qnōmā* at all), withhold their real meanings (and seem to project some other meanings which no one knows!). If names are proved true how the natures can go astray to contradict those very names? If natures have gone astray we have to find out the real names which are other than *bārōyā* and *beryātā*. If the Son is a creature according to scrutiny, further inquiry will show that this creature is 'begotten' (and not created!). Thus the name 'creature' is unable to remain with the name 'creature'; that is, the name 'creature' deserts its own reality (*šrārā*) and flees to the term 'begotten'. What Ephrem intends is: the Son is begotten; if the Son is said to be a creature, that term 'creature' loses its reality and meaning and instead means 'begotten'. Thus names (terms) become meaningless. The *šrārā* of the name creature is 'being a creature'. In this sense *šrārā* is interchangeable with *qnōmā* though *šrārā* need not necessarily mean *qnōmā*; *šrārā* can stand also for *kyānā*. The critic's premises would lead to meaninglessness of all our terms, names and language itself, a position contradictory to human reason. The critic does not make any distinction between human beings who are 'sons' - generated by human beings, but created by God - and the 'Son of God' generated by God and not created. Ephrem's question is only this: what about the *šrārā* of these names? If these names/terms have meaning and *šrārā* Ephrem's

position is unassailable. So the critic will have to deny even his own premise! It is true that all human sons are also creatures; but this is only because their fathers are creatures. The critic fails to observe the fact that the Father has to be first a creature if His Son has to be a creature. The critic makes a change of names and so contradicts the *kyānē*, thereby making meaningful names meaningless.

If the Son has lost His name (Son) because of the incarnation His names are not worthy of our worship. The names of the incarnate Son are meaningful because those names involve the description of His salvific activity. He is compared (*mtīl*) to the Way, the Door and the Lamb. *Mtal* means to speak in parables. Names are parables of reality. Just as parables are not the reality, names are not the reality as such. But parables and names are not unrelated to the reality. One has to look behind the parable for meaning; but scrutinizing the parable destroys parable, reality and meaning as far as the intellect is concerned. The incarnate Son is the Way to the Father, the Door to His Kingdom and the Lamb slain for our atonement. These are all meaningful ways of expression and no special scrutiny is needed to grasp them. Names express the inner meaning without any scrutiny (*‘uqqābā*). Ephrem makes an implicit reference to the name *Īšō* (Jesus) which is fully in agreement with the salvific activity of Christ.¹⁰⁴ The appellations of the incarnate Son are human expressions that convey meaning to hearers who are well disposed. If the names of the incarnate Son are significant parables of reality, then names ‘Son’ and

¹⁰⁴ See above nn 81-82.

‘Begotten’ cannot be otherwise. Reality is represented in and through the parable; meaning is conveyed through the words we use and without this assumption communication of knowledge is impossible. Names explain themselves without any scrutiny because the *ḥaylā* of a name is revealed in and through the name. The *ḥaylā* is active and works wherever the name is present or uttered. In order to clarify the self-explanatory nature of names Ephrem points out a series of names which involve contrasts: ‘*abdā* and ‘*Ābōdā*, *brītā* and *Bārōyā*, *gbīlā* and *Gābōlā*, *Yaldā* and *Yalōdā*. These names reveal the relationships or activities involved. They are manifestations of reality and hence meaningful parables and icons of truth. Every name cited above is clear in itself; at the same time there is an agreement and relationship - which is not the same in every case - between them. This relationship implies a chasm as a result of which one cannot be the other. If all these are clear and accepted by all why should the name Son be an exception? Even through the incarnation the Son did not lose the name Son since ‘He found the lost and returned them’.¹⁰⁵ That is, the incarnate Son did not cease to be the Son of God even after incarnation.

The self-revelatory feature of names is true as regards names like ‘creature’, ‘Son’, etc. Not only in name but also in reality these terms are meaningful and require no scrutiny, because these are exact and proper names arising from *kyānā*, explaining *qnōmā* (revealing *šrārā*). Names are ‘revealed’ (*glayyā*) whereas *kyānā*, *qnōmā* (and *šrārā*) are ‘hidden’ (*ksayyā*). What is ‘revealed’ is not fully ‘revealed’, and what

¹⁰⁵ This theme is repeated in *SdDN* 7, and elaborated in *SdDN* 1-6.

is ‘hidden’ is not fully ‘hidden’; *galyā* does not exhaust or exclude *kasyā*. If the Begetter has no Begotten, then these are only borrowed (*š’īlē*) names. The *kyānā* of these names belongs to somebody other than the Begetter and Begotten, and they are not in reality Begetter and Begotten. Proper names of God, like Father and Son, also would be contradictory since Their proper names are borrowed and in fact no proper names at all. But the fruit is detected by tasting it. By tasting the fruit we detect the root of the fruit. From the very name of the fruit we can identify the taste. Bitter root has bitter fruit; a sweet root produces sweet fruit. If anyone argues that a sweet fruit tastes bitter he does not know how to differentiate between what is sweet and what is bitter. If one thinks that the names *‘abdā* or *beryātā* and *yaldā* or *brā* are the same as regards their reality, then every other name loses its real meaning, contradicting the real *kyānā* and real *qnōmā*. Even if we succeed in arriving at such an absurdity - meaninglessness of all names and terms of our language, an idea Ephrem cannot think of - we cannot turn upside down the names of God. Ephrem offers some clarification: Sometimes some human beings are called ‘good’; or in baptism we are called ‘sons of God’. But does such an appellation (*kunnāyā*) destroy our nature? In spite of these appellations we never cease to be human beings in our nature. ‘Goodness’ is a divine proper name.¹⁰⁶ ‘Son of God’ is not the proper name of any human being as there is only one Son by nature. Nor did God acquire the names ‘Father’ or ‘Son’ as an aftermath of generation. There is perfect identity between God’s *kyānā* and God’s Goodness. He did

¹⁰⁶ Mt 19:17; (Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19).

not acquire the name 'good' by doing some actions which are good. His good actions are natural, flowing from His *kyānā*. Human beings are clad with names proper to the *kyānā* of humanity; human nature is not identical with Goodness or Sonship.

Human names serve as a crucible. If *brā* and '*abdā*' mean the same in their *kyānā*, *qnōmā* (and *šrārā*) the Son is only our fellow-servant (*knātā*). If Son is Lord (*mārā*) the Son is our God.¹⁰⁷ It is true that the Son is servant/creature ('*abdā*'), our fellow-servant (*knātā*) and our true brother (*aḥa šarrīrā*) because of His birth from Mary, but not because of His generation from the Father. Ephrem is only happy to admit the name '*abdā*' for the Son-incarnate,¹⁰⁸ but not for the Son generated from the Father. Thus in his view the Arians are confusing between generation from the Father and birth from Mary, wrongly applying the names of one realm to the other. Nobody can falsify the names of the True Son. In His name we can hear His reality (*šrārā*). If the name 'Son' is 'not true/ real' every name is 'false'. If the name 'Son' is 'true/real' every name is meaningful. The name 'Son' appears meaningless only to those who have lost their ability to distinguish between truth/reality and falsehood. No one can dissipate the meanings of the proper names of God. The proper names of God constitute the flavour of meaning

¹⁰⁷ See *Mt* 21:33-41; *In* 20:28.

¹⁰⁸ Marcellus of Ancyra and Athanasius too interpret *Prov* 8:22 in this sense. See M. Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel iv secolo*, (*SEA* 11, Rome 1975), p. 278; M.J. van Parys, "Exégèse et théologie trinitaire, *Prov.* 8.22 chez les Pères Cappadociennes", *Irénikon* 43 (1970), pp. 362-379. See above nn 18, 25.

behind the Scripture.¹⁰⁹ Scripture reveals the different proper names of God and hence (along with Nature and the Key of Christ) is fundamental for our knowledge about God.

Everything created loses its flavour through mixture. But God's proper names are beyond mixture because His nature is beyond mixture. This is the same as saying that there is no other God: there is an ontological chasm between what is God and what He is not. Here God's proper names are God Himself, manifestations of God's *qnōmā*. The *kyānā* of God is beyond sharing and mixture because there is one and only one God. The *kyānā* remains with God as regards divine proper names even when these names are shared with us. Divinization of human beings does not mean that human beings will share God's *kyānā*. God's *kyānā* and the consequent proper names (*šmahē ḥattītē*) arising from the nature of God remain with God. But an appellation by God is enough to make us divine (though not in *kyānā*). These divine appellations are given to us and since they are God's proper names they are divinizing us without multiplying God or God suffering any loss in His *kyānā*. Since God is God (and there is no other God) He cannot become 'being' or one among beings, instead of being The Being. Moses received both a divine name (*šmā alāhāyā*) and heavenly glory (*zīwā šmayyānā*).¹¹⁰ But he did not dare to say that he is God. It is true that Moses' face shone with the glory of God. But God's *kyānā* is not shared with any creatures. Even without this God is still able to make us divine, as He showed in the case

¹⁰⁹ See above n 98.

¹¹⁰ *HdF* 61:10; See *Ex* 4:16.

of Moses. It would be a feeble God who could not make us divine without losing a portion of His *kyānā*, Ephrem would say. Also such a sharing of *kyānā* would eventually mean the disappearance of the ontological chasm. Any total and absolute disappearance of the ontological chasm would mean that creatures become Creator and Creator become creature (and this would be pantheism!). The *kyānā* of creatures and the *kyānā* of the Creator remain as they are; but because of God's putting on our names in order to clothe us with His names there is a divinization of the human *kyānā* which remains a creature's *kyānā*, though elevated and redeemed by God's will. God's glory is reflected in this divinized *kyānā* because divine names are able to give us a reflection of divine glory. Thereby we are gods but not God; the ontological chasm is still there and creatures are creatures. Communion does not dispense with the original duality.

Just as Moses' face 'shone' as he came down putting on God's name (that is, after being called 'a god' by God) the newly baptized 'shine' because they are being called 'sons' by God. Our baptism is based on three distinct proper and real divine names. Our confession of faith is not in borrowed names. Ultimately we believe, not in the names which God put on from our realm nor in the human beings who put on God's names; but our faith is rooted in God's proper names. Borrowed names are always the natural property of the one who has them as proper names. This means that our proper names and God's proper names are on two levels; consequently our borrowed names and God's borrowed names too cannot be put on the same level. Two levels are the result of the chasm involved in the *kyānā* behind these terms. The 'power' (*ḥaylā*) of Truth (*quštā*) cannot be

separated from Truth though we can (and many do) separate ourselves from Truth. What is meant by Truth in *HdF* 62:13 is nothing other than the Three Names - Father, Son and Spirit - mentioned in stanza 12. These three divine proper names which form the basis of our faith and baptism are the Harmonious Names and are beyond any separation from each other. There is no ontological chasm between these Three Names as there is only One God. No one can say (as the Arians say) that one of those names (that is, the Son) is cut off from the power (*ḥaylā*) of Truth (Divinity). The inseparability of the Three Names is in strict harmony with Ephrem's theory of divine proper names.¹¹¹ That is, if we reject one as less divine we are in fact rejecting all the divine proper names (God Himself). Thus Arianism is shown again as *kāpōrūtā*. But the Arians cannot escape with their dispute: if they accept the names of creatures, which they do, then the divine names cannot be rejected. Names of creatures are heard and accepted as they are. By the same logic divine names demand hearing and acceptance.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE DIVINE NAME, DIVINE PROPER NAMES AND APPELLATIONS

HdF 63: 1-2, 6-12¹¹²

1

My son, who is not aware that anyone who is
surnamed

(Has) also (some) reason for these appellations;¹¹³

¹¹¹ See *HdF* 44: 1-4 in Chapter III.

¹¹² *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, pp.195, 196-197.

¹¹³ Here *kunnāyē* (surnames/appellations) are clearly distinguished from *šmāhē*.

And where it is very necessary they are left behind
and given up,
At the time of a testament, deed¹¹⁴ or (judicial)
inquiries;
True names are required at that time
So that they may seal the truth.

2

Who has not known, that when Our Lord was
crucified
He called (*qrā*) His Father and entrusted His
orphans¹¹⁵ and His disciples:
“My Father, take and keep them!”
Again, when He was raised, and He sealed¹¹⁶ with His
death,
That He is the Son of the Father,
And caused His name to pass over through the
crucible
So that it might be believed in the whole world.

6

From the Lord of All, learn how gentle He is;
For He did not call Himself with the Name of *Ītūtā*;¹¹⁷
For the Name *Ītyā* is greater and high(er) in Its Justice
Than Grace, and Its height does not descend

¹¹⁴ of sale, debt, liberty, etc.

¹¹⁵ That is, His bereaved disciples. Ephrem is using Jn 14: 18 where we find the term *yatmē*.

¹¹⁶ *htam*; the same verb is repeated thrice in *HdF* 63 stanzas 3, 4 and 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ītūtā* is YHYH. See E. Beck, *Die Theologie*, p.11; idem, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.1-2, 93, etc.

To clothe the creatures with His Name and His
Surname.

For It is the Name of *Ītūtā*.

7

Who would not wonder at His Name and at His
mercy!

For His Name is inaccessible to all; but His love is
inclined to all.

And because He has other names¹¹⁸ which are gentle
And suitable for the creatures and inclined
To exalt His servants with His appellations
It was with them He came down and clothed
His 'possessions'¹¹⁹ with His names.

8

The Heavenly King called His' servants kings;¹²⁰
And since He is also The God, He called them also
gods.¹²¹

And as He is also The Judge, behold, His servants
will be judges.¹²²

¹¹⁸ *šmāhē 'hrānē*.

¹¹⁹ *qenyānaw(hy)*; Ephrem is evidently Anti-Marcionite. Creator has not abandoned the created world; instead He is the Pastor of the flock of creation. God as the Owner and Shepherd of the created world is implied here. The providence, protection and care from the part of the Creator are meant. E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.172: 'seine Sklaven'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.319: 'His own creatures'. Both these translations are correct regarding the 'sense'; but none of them explain why the term *qenyānē* is repeatedly used by Ephrem in the place of *beryātā*. See E. Beck, "Die Hyle bei Markion nach Ephrām", *OCP* (1978), pp.18-19.

¹²⁰ Beck refers to *Ps* 108:9.

¹²¹ *Ps* 82:6; *Jn* 10:34-35.

And because they go on foot He called Himself
weary¹²³
And on account of their riding¹²⁴ He made for
Himself even a chariot;¹²⁵
That in all (ways) He should be like us.

9

Who is indeed so entirely stupid and stub born
As to suppose, even if for a while, that because
human beings
Were called with (God's) names the nature of man
and of God
Is therefore one; or because the Lord
Was also called after the name of His servants,
'The made' and 'the Maker' he should weigh in the
same balance.¹²⁶

10

For when He called us ‘kings’ after His own name
The reality applies to Him,¹²⁷ the likeness¹²⁸ applies
to us.¹²⁹

¹²² *Mt* 19:28; *Lk* 22:30; *1Cor* 6:2-3.

¹²³ *Jn* 4:6; see Chapter III n 19.

¹²⁴ riding animal; means of transport.

¹²⁵ *markabtā*. *Mt* 21:7 and *Mk* 11:7 have *rkab*; *Lk* 19:35 gives *arkbū(h)y*. The ass became a ‘means of transport’ for Jesus. In *SdDN* 3 this imagery is further developed: the body of Jesus is compared to the ass, and *Sheol* with Jerusalem which He entered mounted on *rākōbā*. Just as His entrance proclaimed the destruction of Jerusalem his entry into the womb of *Sheol* is going to plunder and empty that womb of death. Ephrem may be referring also to *Ps* 104:3.

¹²⁶ lit. 'he should weigh with the same comparison'; that is, equalize by use of the same kind of language.

¹²⁷ *lwāteh* : ‘with him’, ‘at his side’, etc. The *šrārā* does not depart from Him, nor do we share His *šrārā*.

¹²⁸ *dumyā*: ‘appearance’, ‘resemblance’, ‘reflection’. But without *śrārā* there is no *dumyā*. See Chapter III nn 4,7,34.

¹²⁹ *lwātan*: 'with us', 'on our side'.

But on the other hand, when He called Himself with
the name of His servants
The nature (*kyānā*) applies to us, to Him the
appellation (*kunnāyā*).
(Well) known is the true name and (well) known is
the borrowed name
On our side and also on His side.

11

Therefore, for the (benefit of) the ‘discerning’,
In His mercy He bestowed His Names (on) His
‘possessions’.¹³⁰
It is not for investigation, but for enjoyment.
My brothers, let prying dry up and let us increase
prayers
For while He is not ‘related’ to us, He became as if
He is of our race; and though He is ‘separate’ from all
He is over all, in all.¹³¹

12

But if He had kept Himself ‘separate’
- For it was possible not to clothe His ‘possessions’¹³²
with His names –
And if, as (befitted) our evil, He had loathed us
greatly,

¹³⁰ *l-pārōšē ... l-qenyānaw(hy)*. E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p. 172 ‘für Einsichtige, - seine Sklaven’; S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye* p.47: ‘for the discerning among His creatures’.

¹³¹ *lā mḥayyan* in the previous line has the same sense as *prīš men kol*. Ephrem is referring to the ontological chasm between God (as Creator) and His creatures (as His possessions).

¹³² *qenyānaw(hy)*. E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74* p.172: ‘den Sklaven’. J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.320: ‘His creatures’.

Then He could have made a chasm (*peḥtā*) which can
 never be crossed
 By the 'scribes' who pulled down the walls (*šūrē*)
 with questions,
 The boundaries (*tḥōmē*) with investigations.

If someone is called by a particular appellation there should be a proper reason behind this. But such titles (*kunnāyē*) are no substitutes for the real names. So the name (*šmā*) is necessary for every official purpose. Signature with one's real name ratifies the document; an appellation, surname or nickname is insufficient for ratification. The *šmā* stands for the person¹³³ whereas the *kunnāyē* cannot take the place of the *šmā*; attestation of truth (*qušta*) is possible only with the *šmā*. Our Lord 'sealed' the testament of His death, the bill of divorce and the calling of the Peoples using the *šmā* 'Son of the Father'. The invocation of the Father by the Son is indeed the attestation of what is behind the *šmā* of the Father. The Name *Ītūtā* was not invoked by the Lord since the Name *Ītyā* is through 'Justice' (*kēnūtā*) far above 'Grace' (*taybūta*).¹³⁴ The Name *Ītūtā* did not (and need not) descend to created beings. Nor are created beings clothed with *Ītūtā* and *Ītyā*. *Ītūtā* cannot be shared with creatures, nor can *Ītyā* be applied to creatures. This explains Ephrem's great polemic against Bardaisanite views of *Ītyē*: for Ephrem there is no

¹³³ The same view we find also in Acts of Thomas and Aphrahat, See P. Bruns, *Das Christusbild*, pp.155-156; but see below, translation of *SdF* 11:581-680.

¹³⁴ Philo, *The Special Laws*, 1:37 (LCL 320, Philo VII, pp. 276-279); by contrast, Rabbinic doctrine associated the *Tetragrammaton*/Divine Name with the 'aspect of mercy'.

plural for *Ītyā*, since there is only One God who alone is *Ītūtā*. The Name is *Ītūtā* and it remains behind the ontological chasm; it is to be marvelled at; it is not accessible to anyone other than itself. But the mercy and love descends to everyone. The Name of God par excellence is standing apart for ever and ever. But ‘other names’ of God are sweet (gentle and merciful) and hence suitable for created beings. By calling His servants with these ‘other names’ God exalts these servants. God’s coming down is in these ‘other names’ because these are the names which are put on His *qenyānē*. God alone is *Ītūtā*; creatures are *qenyānē*. There is a chasm between these two, since *qenyānē* cannot be *Ītūtā*; such an inability on the part of *qenyānē* is not an imperfection. There is no plurality for *Ītūtā*; any kind of numerical multiplicity in *Ītūtā* is against biblical monotheism as understood by Ephrem.

Ephrem gives some examples of God’s ‘other names’ which God put on His servants. There is only One King: the One in heaven (*malkā šmayyānā*). This is typically an OT concept as far as Ephrem is concerned.¹³⁵ When the People

¹³⁵ *ISam* 8:5-8; *Ex* 19:6 (and *IPet* 2:9) may also be the background here; so too the idea of Adam as ‘king’ over the created world entrusted to him. About God as The King see, M. Buber, *Kingship of God*, pp.99-107; G. Widengren, *Sacrales Königtum im Alten Testament und im Judentum*, (Stuttgart 1955); S. H. Hooke, ed., *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, (Oxford 1958); idem, *The Sacred Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIth International Congress for the History of Religions, Rome, April 1955*, (Leiden 1959); A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, (Cardiff 1967), passim; H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans., J. Sturdy, (London 1973), pp.36-42, 99-107, 163-173.

asked for 'a king to judge them like all the nations, (*1 Sam* 8:5) they have rejected God the One and Only King (*1 Sam* 8:6-7) as their action implies going after other gods (*1 Sam* 8:8). Pharaoh was god and king. The King of the People is God alone until this time. Deserting the King for kings is idolatry since kings are 'gods'. This One King called His servants with the name 'kings', and since He is The King they are made kings by this calling (and anointing). The Royal Appellation is so powerful that the royal servants are kings since He bestowed His *šmā* King - over them. What the servants receive is not His inalienable *šmā* but the *kunnāyā*, a shade and glory of His name whereby the recipient gets a new role over God's flock. His *šmā* (which is almost identical with *kyānā* or *qnōmā*) remains with Him, as He alone is The King. There is 'no other' (God or) King other than the One in heaven. Similarly He called them 'gods' because He is the God and He alone can bestow such a title to human beings. Another *kunnāyā* which the servants received is His name 'Judge'. His *šmā* never departs from Him, though the *kunnāyā* is given over to His servants. So when the servants who are given these divine appellations do not act accordingly, the real King/God/Judge intervenes for the sake of His Names which are in disrepute because of His unworthy servants.

Since divine names are divine manifestations there is no end to the divine names, though divine proper names are distinguishable. These innumerable divine names are just *kunnāyē* which He put on Himself for our benefit. Though such appellations do not belong to His divine *kyānā* there is some theological, soteriological and pedagogical reason

behind them. Since His servants used to go on foot He also went about walking. Here the servants are human beings in general, but with an implicit reference to the prophets and apostles who wandered from place to place. Since His servants become tired after walking, He too became weary after walking (as we read in *Jn* 4 etc). Ephrem is not just referring to the daily human experiences of Jesus, though these are implied here. This is God's incarnation in human language (in Scripture) which has its climax in the incarnation in the human body (in Jesus). The servants sometimes use means of transport such as a riding animal or a chariot. So God too decided to make a chariot. Ephrem is referring to the chariot in Ezekiel as well as to the ass which Jesus mounted. There is no limit to God's incarnation in human language. God's footsteps were audible to Adam in Paradise (*Gen* 3:8). By bringing together the anthropomorphic language of the OT and the human experiences of Jesus, Ephrem seems to allude to the idea of the bodily incarnation of God as the continuation and culmination of God's incarnation into human language.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ It is not altogether surprising to find that a modern Jewish scholar speaks of the incarnation of God in human language. See J. Neusner, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism*, (Philadelphia 1988), p.xi: "But I do maintain that the Judaism of the dual Torah resorted to the incarnation of God. I maintain that the incarnation of God formed part of the unfolding of the inner logic of that Judaism, as it does of any Judaic system spun out of the heritage of the Hebrew Scriptures. I do hold that and, in this book, I prove it". I had to produce this book to be allowed to include this citation here. Syriac Christianity has every claim to be closer to Semitic perspectives in general. Unfortunately in dialogues between Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions the significant role of Syriac Christianity is not brought to light. Very often Christianity is pictured exclusively as the Western or Graeco-Latin versions of that religion.

God has become like us in all ways and we need not be afraid to describe God in our language. There is only one criterion for the validity of our language about God: when we speak about God's proper names we should not confuse them with God's titles or appellations which are in fact our proper names (terms which describe that which is naturally human and not naturally divine). What God has spoken in human language is not the same as what man has spoken about God in his own language. The element of revelation from the divine side makes the difference. In other words the dimension of the ontological chasm should never be forgotten even when we speak about that God who came over to our side; though He is like one of us by His own will, He is still that God who is also beyond the chasm; that is, He is far away and very close at the same time. His descent into our realm did not make Him any less God, or someone we can grasp solely as a creature.

Only the utterly stupid and obstinate can imagine that use of an appellation changes the original *kyānā*. When God put on the names of His servants (creatures as God's possessions or flock) the *kyānā* of servants remains with servants and does not pass over to God. God spoke in human terms in OT, adapting himself to human parlance. But as He put on a human body human *kyānā* too was assumed. Otherwise the Omniscient would not have been ignorant of

Indeed this non-Semitic approach has produced a Christian theology that is separated from its Semitic matrix. Had there been sincere and serious discussions between three Semitic Monotheistic religions our world would have been radically different!

the name of demons; nor would the Almighty have become weary after walking; nor would the Living One have entered the womb of death. This important distinction between God's incarnation into human names and His incarnation in a human body is clear in Ephrem's theology. 'Abōdā (Maker) and 'bīdā (what is made) can never be put on two sides of the same balance because of the ontological chasm. Creator is the Master, Ruler (Owner, King and Lord) of what He created. He loves, cares for, protects and guides them as His flock. This concept underlies Ephrem's view of creatures as *qenyānē*. The reality (*šrārā*) of the King is always with Him and Him alone. The reflection or similitude (*dumyā*) of *šrārā* is what we get by the appellation. The *šrārā* retains the *šmā* whereas the *kunnāyā* and *dumyā* are transferred. The *kyānā* of *šrārā* (described, but not defined by *šmā*) is not the same as the *dumyā* (*kunnāyā*). There is no multiplicity of the *kyānā* or *qnōmā* behind the *šrārā*, whereas any amount of *dumyā* can be achieved by giving *kunnāyā*. It is possible to understand the *kyānā* of proper names as the reality and the appellations as reflections in the mirror. We can multiply the reflection using many mirrors, but the reality itself is not multiplied. Those who look in the mirror can see the reality in the reflection. Reality, reflection and their interconnectedness are all different. So a true name (*šmā d-quštā*) and a borrowed name (*šmā š'īlā*) should never be confused.

The *qenyānē* receive God's names not for scrutiny ('*uqqābā*) but as 'a banquet' to be enjoyed. Since God is beyond ontological chasm, there is no 'kindred' for God so that we can exactly and absolutely define God by balancing Him with His 'kindred'. So God is called 'Separate-from-all'

(*prīš men kol*); yet He became one of us through the incarnation of names and ultimately and really through the incarnation of the Son. In the incarnate Son reality, mirror and reflection became identical. Though He crossed over to our side of the chasm for our benefit we cannot and should not presume that He is only our 'kindred' (that is, He is no more beyond the chasm) and hence a fellow-servant and co-creature. He is no relative of ours because we are only His creatures and He is our Creator. God could have chosen to remain as *prīš men kol*, not crossing the chasm so as to clothe us with His names. But we are His *qenyānē* and God's love towards the *qenyānē* is not in any way controlled by the wickedness of these *qenyānē*. If He had decided to act according to the evil which the *qenyānē* show, then He could have created a chasm (*peḥtā*) that He too does not cross. But He did not create any such *peḥtā* that He is unwilling to cross. In fact He crossed the *peḥtā* to enable us to cross the *peḥtā* in so far as we are enabled to do so as creatures. His crossing is the real and crucial step. He even allowed the 'scribes' to pull down the 'walls' with questions, and the 'boundaries' with investigations. So He cannot be blamed for anything. Since He did cross over to our side, the 'scribes' have assumed that there was indeed no *peḥtā* which He crossed, and they presume to speak about God just as we speak about all created realities.

According to Ephrem God could have remained beyond the chasm and we would not have known anything about God and we would not have been adorned with 'discernment'. If God had hidden Himself absolutely from us our intellect would never have arrived at the idea of God. As

creatures we would still be His *qenyānē* but we would not have been able to know even that. But then the Creator would be the stranger God of the Marcionites: He created and left the creatures alone without showing any more care. Here we find why Ephrem uses the term *qenyānē* for creatures. It implies a relationship between a caring shepherd and his beloved sheep. The archaic etymological meaning¹³⁷ of the term *qenyānē* seems to have been known to Ephrem: Creator is also the Owner who carefully governs what He created. We shall come across the word *qenyānē* again and again in Ephrem and continue to explore this concept which is essential to elucidate the ideas of ontological chasm and divine names.

¹³⁷ *Gen* 14:19.22; *Deut* 32:6; *Ps* 139:13; *Prov* 8:22f. In *Peshitta* and *Targums* *Prov* 8:22 has *brā* instead *qnā*. See A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, p.48 n 2. For further bibliography see above Chapter I n 9.

CHAPTER V
MANIFESTATION OF *KASYĀTĀ* IN AND
THROUGH *GALYĀTĀ*

HdF 76:1-12¹

1

With the name of trees, behold, also their fruits
Are called,² whether they are sweet
Or bitter.

Refrain:

Blessed are You in Your Father!

2

The same are the names, both of trees
And of their fruits; they are distinct but equal.³
A great symbol!⁴

3

Separate (*prīš*) is the fruit from its tree,
But equal with it; for a single appellation⁵
Is given to them both.

¹ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, pp.232-233.

² *metkanneyn*. *Kunnāyā* of fruits come from the *kunnāyā* of trees. Here *kunnāyā* and *šmā* are the same, unlike the case elsewhere. See *HdF* 63:1 and note 64 in Chapter IV; see below nn 38, 53.

³ 'separate but the same'.

⁴ *rāzā rabbā*: a great type/mystery/model.

⁵ *ḥad kunnāyā*. See above n 2.

4

Sweet the Root, sweet also its Fruit.
 With the same name⁶ they have called Them both,
 It⁷ and Its Fruit.

5

Separate the names of the stem and its fruit;
 And make them alike⁸ again, and call the fruit
 With the name of its tree.

6

If it is sweet they call sweet
 Both the fruit and its root
 Being strong (flavoured).⁹

7

Separate the names of the Father and the Son
 And make them alike again; for the Father is God
 And the Son is God.

8

Now, God is the name of the Father
 And God is also the name of the Son,
 As it is written.¹⁰

9

For (He is) separate in name, because He is the Son
 But He is alike¹¹ in name, because He is God also.
 Glory to His name!

⁶ *ba-šmā šawyā*. See above n 2.

⁷ The Root is the Father; see E.Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp. 75-77.

⁸ 'agree'.

⁹ See E. Beck, *CSCO 155 Syr 74*, p.199 n 2; *HdF* 65:7; *SdF* 2:25-32.

¹⁰ Beck refers to *Is* 9:6, *Jn* 1:1 and *Rom* 9:5 in particular. But probably Ephrem is referring to the baptismal narratives in the Gospels. See *Mt* 28:19.

¹¹ 'identical', 'equal', etc.

10

And since both (the names of) trees and their fruits
Are true, (the names) of Father and the Son
How much more are they true!

11

He depicted 'hidden things'¹² upon 'things
manifest'¹³

To show the invisible
Through the visible.

12

And He imprinted¹⁴ His symbols¹⁵ on the trees
To explain the incomprehensible
Through the comprehensible.

Ephrem exploits the *rāzā* of tree, root and fruit. The names of trees are also the names of their fruits. But their inner identity is inseparable; so too their names. The reason behind this inseparable equality of name and nature is the root. The nature of the root, or stock, is manifest in and through the nature of the fruit; so also their names. We can separate the fruits from their proper stem. But when we sort the fruits according to their kind we sort them according to the name of the stem or tree or root. The quality underlying the fruit is none other than that of the root. Ephrem follows strict logic in applying this *rāzā* to the Father and the Son. The name God is common to both Father and the Son. Since the name God is the proper and real name of both we cannot

¹² *kasyātā* : secrets, mysteries, things hidden.

¹³ *galyātā* : things manifest, visible or revealed.

¹⁴ *ršam* : inscribed.

¹⁵ *rāzaw(hy)*: or, His mysteries. It stands for *kasyātā* in the previous stanza.

say that the Father is God and the Son is not God. The name God is the root; the name Father is the tree; the name Son is the fruit. Thus Arianism is shown again as *kāpōrtūtā* since it denies the Father by denying the Son.

Since creation is revelation according to Ephrem, God's pedagogy is crystal clear in Nature. We can comprehend only what is 'visible' - visible to our physical or intellectual senses. But God is beyond every visibility as He is on the other side of the chasm. Human intellect is able to comprehend what is 'visible', what is on our side of the chasm. Here the term 'visible' does not mean only what is physically visible - corporeality; it includes also anything that the 'eye' of human mind is able to reach and penetrate. Thus God inscribed the invisible and incomprehensible 'hidden' divine *rāzē* on the visible and comprehensible, as for example on trees. Though Ephrem does not give illustrations here one has no difficulty in finding them when he speaks about the trees of the Garden of Eden; we can also find the picture of Abraham who saw hidden and future 'mysteries' inscribed on the tree (Gen 22). Ephrem is thinking of the tree of Paradise to the tree of the Cross, thereby depicting the focal point of salvation history. The content of *rāzē* is hidden, though *rāzē* as such are not hidden. The future dimension of *rāzē* remains hidden until it becomes clear by realization. When Ephrem says that *rāzē* are revealed it does not mean that every aspect of them is fully and ultimately revealed. In fact God's imprints are everywhere visible or audible on our side of the chasm as these are meant to teach us. Thus God is an artist who has depicted *kasyātā* upon *galyātā*.¹⁶ We see

¹⁶ These terms are studied by Noujaim in his unpublished thesis. G. Noujaim, "Anthropologie et économie", *PdO* 9 (1979/ 80), pp.313-315. See below n 102; but see the following pages of our present chapter, for

(physically, intellectually, or in both ways) and meditate on the *galyātā*. But behind the *galyātā* there are always the *kasyātā*. There are two layers in *galyātā*. The canvas of the artist is the outer layer of *galyātā*. But the more important layer consists in the inner *galyātā* - pictures that are portrayed on the canvas *galyātā*. Canvas and portrait on the canvas are *galyātā*, but not in the same sense; the former, because our naked eyes can easily see and understand that it is a canvas; the latter too, because our eyes can see the portrait and to some extent grasp the idea the artist wants to convey through it. The imagery of canvas, portrait on the canvas and the eyes are sometimes substituted by word/language and the content/meaning and the ears. Then there are also the eyes and ears of our mind which see or hear more than what the physical eyes and physical ears see and hear. Hence the idea of revelation is more associated with the portrait rather than with the canvas as such. But what is revealed through the picture is depicted on the canvas and hence it serves as a vehicle for revelation. Theological language and icons do the same service to our comprehension of what is revealed. Eyes and ears – visible and invisible, corporeal and spiritual serve the same purpose.

Nature (also Scripture) is only the canvas and should not be confused with revelation itself. What is revealed is different from that on which it is revealed. Even what is revealed is different from what is still 'hidden' behind. Both the canvas and the picture on it are visible to the human intellect, though the intellect has to strive hard to understand

a succinct exposition of these terms in Ephrem's theological thinking. Without repeating the findings of Noujaim's study, we try to explain some aspects which he did not explore.

the picture by interpreting it; even in the case of human artists the artist, or rather his mind, is not visible to physical eyes gazing at the canvas. The divine artist is absolutely invisible to the human intellect, fully hidden and beyond the chasm. But the artist's mind is 'revealed' in and through the picture on the canvas. The physical eyes that look at the picture and the 'eye' of our mind which interprets the invisible mind of the artist with the help of the visible picture can never have an absolute and ultimate comprehension of the artist's mind which created the picture. Sight and interpretation are common on the one hand and personal on the other hand. So numerous and different interpretations are possible though these cannot exclude each other in essentials. The pictures in Nature are not incomprehensible though they are not absolutely comprehensible. Divine names themselves are *galyātā*. Because of the inner relation between divine *galyātā* and *kasyātā* behind them, awe and wonder, praise and thanksgiving should not be separated from theological language. Both speech and silence befit the depiction of *rāzē*. *Galyātā* become meaningless if we think of *galyātā* apart from *kasyātā*. Thus when Ephrem understands creation as revelation he has nothing in common with the ideas of emanation or pantheism. For him there is only one *Ītūtā*. And *qenyānē* are the result of the love of *Ītūtā* whose will became manifest in the creation of *qenyānē*. *Ītūtā* could have chosen not to reveal His love towards His *qenyānē* even after the initial manifestation of His love in creation (which also could have been avoided if the will had so decided).

SELF-REVEALING *ĪTYĀ**SdF* 1:115-126¹⁷

115

If it is (the case) that there is another *Ītyā*
 (Even that) would not be able to scrutinize (the Son).
 It would not be from Him, so as to be capable (to
 scrutinize).

But for (Him) who is from Him, it is possible.

119

But if, being 'alien', He had known
 He would have been 'a relative' or 'a kinsman'.
 Had there been (really) another *Ītyā*
 Then He would only have known Himself.

123

Either He¹⁸ is far away like 'a stranger'
 Or near like 'a kindred'.
 If there is another related *Ītyā*
 It is the One who is many in names.¹⁹

REVELATION OF THE HIDDEN ONE

SdF 11:355-356²⁰

You do not arrive at²¹ 'the things manifest'
 How can you understand 'the Hidden One' (*Kasyā*)?

¹⁷SCO 212 Syr 88, p.3.

¹⁸The Son is not an additional *Ītyā* as there is only one *Ītyā*, clearly an anti-Marcionite, anti-dualist, anti-Bardaisanite, anti-Manichaean and anti-Arian position. See *HcH* 48:1.

¹⁹See E. Beck, *CSCO* 213 Syr 89, p.5 n 17; idem, *Die Theologie*, p.40; idem, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.3-4, 14.

²⁰SCO 212 Syr 88, p.15.

²¹understand'.

*SdF II:429-436*²²

And why should we weary ourselves to narrate
 The creatures which are incomprehensible?
 For behold, at the investigation of ‘things manifest’
 They become like ‘hidden things’.
 And if ‘manifest things’ are (also) ‘hidden’
 Indeed how much more ‘hidden’, ‘the things hidden’.
 And if ‘the things hidden’ are ‘hidden’
 How much more ‘hidden’ ‘the Hidden One’ in His
 ‘hiddenness’!

*SdF IV: 151-156*²³

You have heard the reality²⁴ in ‘(things) manifest’
 Do not go astray about ‘(things) hidden’.
 Simon spoke ‘the things revealed’
 He gave the truth²⁵ and received the blessing.²⁶
 Observe that Simon spoke (only) one (word).
 Do not be led astray with many (words).

There is only one *Ītyā*; but it put on many names.
 There are many things which are visible to the naked eye, but
 which are incomprehensible. If this is the case with many of
 the created things we see, one should be silent in awe as
 regards the *Ītūtā* which is beyond the reach of even the ‘eye’
 of the mind. For when we start investigating the *galyātā* they
 become as if *kasyātā*. Thus even created things that are
 manifest become hidden (*kasyān*); that is to say, the *galyātā*

²² *CSCO 212 Syr 88*, pp.16-17.

²³ *CSCO 212 Syr 88*, p.35.

²⁴ *šrārā*.

²⁵ *quštā*.

²⁶ *Mt 16:16-17*.

cannot be known fully and absolutely. If our knowledge about *galyātā* proves to be very rudimentary one should be even more careful about the *kasyātā* which are hidden (*kasyān*). The thought of Ephrem can be summarized as follows:

(1) Creatures are *galyātā* : (visible to the eye of human mind or intellect). But even these *galyātā* become some sort of *kasyātā* on investigation, because the human intellect has to strive hard and investigate the very things of which our physical eyes see (a picture) or our ears hear (words). Even after a thorough scrutiny we find that there is still more lying behind as 'hidden', as 'mystery'. Thus even *galyātā* are also *kasyān* to some extent.

(2) The *kasyātā* : (any thing hidden for physical and mental eyes, as for example spiritual or invisible creatures like angels or demons). These are not *galyātā* as such; they are even more *kasyān* if we contrast them with material or visible creatures.

(3) If this is the case with *galyātā* (things manifest) and *kasyātā* (things hidden) how can one speak about *Ītyā* who is *ksē* (hidden) as the *Kasyā* (Hidden one) on account of His *kasyūtā* (hiddenness)! This is about the ultimate boundary (ontological chasm) of the creatures.

If we have only limited knowledge about creatures we are all the more unable to grasp the Creator. Creatures are visible or invisible, manifest or hidden; but many of the visible things in the created universe are not easily understood by the human mind. Visible things are easier to grasp; yet even they have an invisible or hidden dimension

which is not yet revealed to the mind. Here the term 'visibility' is the almost the same as 'comprehensibility'. So when Ephrem says God is *kasyā* (hidden) he means: God is beyond the ontological chasm. What can we know about God except what is 'revealed' (*gā*)? These *galyānā* are God's revelation in Nature, in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. Simon Peter spoke *galyānā*²⁷ (things which are revealed to him by the Father; things which his words revealed to others) and these *galyānā* (words of Simon) contained *šrārā* and *quštā*. Simon's usual talkativeness is absent here since he spoke only a word.²⁸ The unusual brevity of Simon's reply is not surprising to Ephrem because revelation is not a matter of many words or empty eloquence. Since *šrārā* and *quštā* are present in the *galyānā* about God one need not go astray about the *kasyānā* of God. This is because God has crossed over to our side and in the incarnate Son God's *šrārā* and *quštā* are portrayed in *galyānā*. These *galyānā* are in Scripture and Nature - two treasures which are opened with the Key of Christ. To scrutinize *galyānā* will lead one astray from *šrārā* and *quštā*. The *galyānā* which Simon spoke is revelation, and it is so not only for him and for his fellow apostles but also for us.²⁹

DIVINE NAMES ARE *GALYĀTĀ*

SdF II: 581-680³⁰

581

Sufficient for our weakness

Is the reality³¹ that comes in *galyānā*.³²

²⁷ The verb *gā* (to reveal) occurs in *Mt* 16:17.

²⁸ *SdF* II 55, see *Mt* 16:16-17, *Jn* 13:24, see also *HdF* 84 re. *SdF* II 41, 53-64, 97-110.

²⁹ See *SdF* II 191, IV 155, VI 129-130.

³⁰ CSCO 212 Syr 88, pp.20-22

Confess that there exist Father and Son
In reality and in names.

585

The root of name is *qnōmā*:³³
In it are the names bound.
For who will give a name
To something whose *qnōmā* does not exist!³⁴

589

How was it named 'Fruit'
If it did not exist in reality?
Give the name 'Root' to the Father
Call the Son as His Fruit.

593

Intermingled (*hlīt*) with Him, but distinct (*prīš*) from
Him

He is in His womb³⁵ and at His right hand.³⁶
But if He was not 'mingled' (*mzīg*) with Him
His Beloved would not have been in His womb.

597

And again, if He was not distinct from Him
He would not be sitting at His right hand.

³¹ *šrārā*.

³² 'things revealed'.

³³ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.29: 'das (benannte) Ding'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.380: 'subsistency'. A better term for Ephrem's idea of *qnōmā* here would be 'true identity' as noted by Brock.

³⁴ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.29: 'einem etwas ohne eigne Ding(lichkeit)'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.380: 'an aught, when the subsistency belonging to it had no existence'.

³⁵ *Jn 1:18*: *b- 'ubbā d-abū(hy)*; see above Chapter IV n 54.

³⁶ *Mt 26: 64*.

He is intermingled with Him, for He is in His womb
 He is distinct from Him, for He is at His right hand.

601

They are One³⁷ with one Will
 They are Two with two names.
 They do not have two wills;
 They do have two appellations.³⁸

605

The name of Fatherhood belongs to the Father;
 His name retains His own glory.³⁹
 The name Generateness belongs to the Son;
 His name retains His generation.

609

In the name of Father (is) the indication of Him⁴⁰
 In the name of Son (is) His explanation.⁴¹
 In the ordering (*tukkāsā*) of Their names
 Is kept the ordering of the statements about Them.⁴²

613

Just as Their names
 Cannot be obscured and be (only) one;

³⁷ See *Jn* 10:30.

³⁸ *šmā* and *kunnāyā* are the same in this stanza. See nn 2, 53.

³⁹ The same idea we find in *HdF* 78:21, 25.

⁴⁰ E. Beck, *CSCO* 213 *Syr* 89, p.30: 'seine Erkenntnis'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p. 382: 'the manifestation of Him'; *šuddā'ā* means a sign, mark, indication, a narration, a predicate, explanation, meaning, clarification, etc.

⁴¹ *puššāqā* is interpretation, translation, commentary, etc.

⁴² *tukkāsā d-šarbayhōn* means the 'order in which the subject about them is dealt with'. 'Statements' or 'descriptions' about them have a special 'order'. See Chapter IV n 38.

Thus also statements about Them⁴³
Cannot be concealed so as to be one.

617

But the Jews concealed
The Begotten who cannot be concealed.
For the statements about Him are clear in His
prophets
The explanations about Him are preserved in His
symbols (*rāzē*).

621

Not even fruit and tree
Are one (and the same), though they are one.
The fruit is known as fruit,
And the tree as root.

625

By one (and) the same love they are united
By two names they are distinguished.
The name fruit belongs only to the fruit;
And the name tree, (only) to the root.

629

Two names and two *qnōmē*⁴⁴
 Are intermingled through a single *ḥaylā* and love.
 And if there is (only) the name fruit
 And not the *qnōmā*⁴⁵ of fruit

⁴³ See E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.16-20.

⁴⁴ E. Beck, *CSCO 213* Syr 89, p. 30: 'Zwei Namen und zwei Dinge'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.382: 'two subsistencies'.

⁴⁵ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.30: 'das dadurch bezeichnete Ding'; see J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.210 note c; p. 382 note x (continued in

633

You have named the tree, ‘root’

Because of the name ‘fruit’, which it did not bear!

But just as the tree is (/exists)

Both in name and in *qnōmā*⁴⁶

637

(So too) the fruit like it, for it also

Is (existing) in name and in reality.⁴⁷

If fruit is (only) in name

But the root (is) in *qnōmā*

641

You have named a falsity and a reality,

For one is and the other is not.

But true/real (*šarrīr*) is the Generator

He exists in name and in reality.⁴⁸

pp.383-384). It is better to leave the term *qnōmā* untranslated so that imposition of later meanings can best be avoided.

⁴⁶ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.31: ‘durch den Namen und durch das Ding’; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p. 383: ‘in name and likewise in subsistency’.

⁴⁷ *ba-šmā w-ba-šrārā*. E.Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.31: ‘durch den Namen und durch das Ding’; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p. 384: ‘in name and in reality’. Thus Beck takes both *qnōmā* (See above n 45) and *šrārā* as ‘das Ding’.

⁴⁸ *ʾīṭaw(hy) ba-šmā w-ba-šrārā*. E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p. 31: ‘er existiert durch den Namen und durch die Wirklichkeit’. In *SdF* II:638 *ba-šrārā* is ‘durch das Ding’; in *SdF* II:636 *ba-qnōmā* is ‘durch das Ding’; in *SdF* II:644 *ba-šrārā* is ‘durch die Wirklichkeit’. Though Ephrem uses *qnōmā* and *šrārā* interchangeably there is a very subtle distinction as pointed out by Noujaim and supported by Bou Mansour. See E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, p.14; idem, *Philosophische Schrift*, p.32 n 24; idem, *Ephräms Polemik*, pp.75–76; idem, *Die Hyle bei Markion*, p.24; G. Noujaim, “Essai sur quelques aspects de la philosophie”, pp.30-43; T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, pp.169-176, 186-187, 199-200; J. Martikainen, *Das Böse und der Teufel*, pp.22-33; Ortiz

645

Thus just as much as it is unfitting
That He should have two wills,
So it is fitting that
Both⁴⁹ are found in Their realities.

649

We have learned about the Father through His name;
We have known the Son through His name.
Without names, there is no knowledge.
It is through a name that narration⁵⁰ can take place.

653

Remove⁵¹ the names and appellations,
Then behold, the orderings have become confused.
You (can) not discern (him) upon whom you call;
You do not know whom you confess.

657

Who begot, you do not distinguish;
Who was born, you do not discern.
Because (there) came two names
In the type⁵² of two lights

de Urbina in *OCP* 44 (1978), p.526. In *HdF* 62:6 *ba-šmā w-ba-šrārā* occurs twice and Beck is correct in translating both as 'dem Namen nach und in Wirklichkeit'.

⁴⁹ Father and Son. The shift between singular (He) and plural (Both) is remarkable in this stanza, and it is natural to Ephrem's Semitic way of thinking. See below n 78.

⁵⁰ E. Beck, *CSCO* 213 *Syr* 89, p.31: 'das Erkennen'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.384: 'manifestations'. See above n 40.

⁵¹ See E. Beck, *CSCO* 213 *Syr* 89, p.31 n 53

⁵² *b-tupsā* : like.

661

(There) fled the darkness which covered
Discernment from the hearers.
You learnt about the Father by His name,
And the Only-Begotten by His appellation.⁵³

665

You have heard, ‘Father’; His name is enough for
you.
And the name of the Son is sufficient for you.
There is no face (*parṣōpā*) there
That you might recognize⁵⁴ from faces:

669

Their names have become faces for us,
Through Their names They are distinguished.
Even people, when they are far away
Are recognized⁵⁵ through their names.

673

Instead of far-away faces
There enter⁵⁶ the near-by names.
Instead of faces, appellations;
And names instead of pictures.⁵⁷

⁵³ Here Ephrem does not distinguish between the concepts of *šmā* and *kunnāyā*, as it is clear from *SdF* II:665-666, 602, 604–610, 669-670. See above n 2.

⁵⁴ learn about, understand, inspect closely, etc.

⁵⁵ As soon as we hear the names, the faces are already in our mind as mental pictures and hence we recognize them from the very mentioning of names.

⁵⁶ in our mind. But ‘entering’ the name in documents ‘substitute’ people; signature stands for the person. See J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.413; see above Chapter IV n 133.

⁵⁷ *ṣūrātā*: forms, images, features, portraits, etc.

677

The voice (*qālā*) rises up (*dānaḥ*) instead of light,
 And instead of eye, the (sense of) hearing.
 The ear is near to the names
 And discerns them as if images.⁵⁸

Our weak human intellect has quite enough to learn from *galyātā* because of the *šrārā* that comes along with them. This kind of *galyātā* is the created canvas; upon this is the portrait which represents, reflects and reveals *šrārā* though there is no ultimate and absolute transparency. But the relative transparency between *galyātā* (portrait, word, etc.) and *kasyātā* (the idea in the mind of the artist who painted the portrait, or of one who speaks/writes) enables the intellect to understand the picture and to communicate that knowledge with the help of words. In this communication, knowledge itself is an example of *kasyātā* and the words which convey this knowledge serve as an illustration of *galyātā*. According to Ephrem words are pigments for the canvas of communication; the speaker/writer is a painter; language is a series of portraits.⁵⁹ Here too there is no absolute identity between knowledge and communication though there is a relative identity. This relative identity is crucial to the communication of any knowledge. *Galyātā* have two sides: created and visible realities as well as revealed and invisible realities which are just portraits on the

⁵⁸ *šalmē*: pictures, forms, figures, etc; (not statues, but portraits).

⁵⁹ See above Chapter II. D. Anderson, trans., *St. John of Damascus: On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, (Crestwood 1980), pp.16-17, 23; p.25: "Just as words speak to the ear, so the image speaks to the sight...". John of Damascus cites *Deut* 4: 12 twice in this context. C.P. Roth, trans., *St. Theodore the Studite: On the Holy Icons*, p.34: "If you admit that the acuity of sight is equal to that of hearing, which is true ..."

visible realities. Revelation is available only in and through the created and visible realities. Here the term 'visible' means either physical or mental, intellectual, spiritual visibility. No one can enjoy *śrārā* if he fails to notice the picture on the canvas because he is more interested in scrutinizing the canvas itself, thereby either neglecting or destroying the revealed reality (that is, the portrait) under the pretext of investigating the portrait. Nor can anyone see the reflection of reality without looking into the mirror.

Words are important in Ephrem's theory of human knowledge, but he cannot think of really meaningless words. He has no concept of purely abstract words or names. Once words become devoid of meaning those words are unable to communicate any kind of knowledge. So, for Ephrem words have an inseparable inner link with reality - whether real or imaginary - and hence cannot be without some specific meaning. Words are able to proclaim this meaning when those words are uttered and the sound of the utterance is listened to. Words create images in our mind, and hence are comparable to portraits or icons which our physical eyes see. Words are to the ears what pictures are to the eyes. The whole theological descriptions of Ephrem can be best depicted as a series of icons and I hope one day an icon painter will take up such a task. For Ephrem words are pictures and pictures are words, and there is no barrier in between both. The process of acquisition and communication of knowledge necessarily involves all the physical and intellectual, mental or spiritual faculties of the human being. Thus an opposition between faith and reason is unthinkable for Ephrem and this is clear evidence that his way of thinking is not shaped by Hellenistic logic and hence should be interpreted by means of his own system of thought which has its

own inner logic. Whatever knowledge we acquire is the result of keen observation - both physical and intellectual. Ephrem himself was a keen observer of the natural world and in this regard few of the Fathers rival him.⁶⁰ We observe and receive the *galyātā* with the help of meaningful pictures or words. Listening to the voice is just as important as seeing in acquiring knowledge. In the case of invisible realities the physical senses do not suffice. The whole mind has to be active in order to receive the *galyātā* and thereby get a limited and relative understanding of the meaning conveyed through *galyātā*. Just by gazing at a portrait no one can understand the ideas depicted by it; the 'eye' of the human mind too must 'see' the portrait, and it is only then that we grasp the meaning, albeit in an imperfect manner. This imperfection of our understanding is the natural consequence of our being just created beings and not the Creator whose knowledge alone is perfect and infinite. For the Creator everything is 'visible' and nothing is 'hidden'. The ontological chasm just does not limit Him.

Names are also words and hence *galyātā* for our 'ears'; but the *šrārā* of names lies in the very names which Ephrem calls *qnōmā*. *Šrārā* is often *qnōmā* and *kyānā* taken together. In Ephrem's mind *qnōmā* and *kyānā* are rather fluid concepts and he does not make a strict demarcation between the two, because he is thinking in concrete terms. Names are bound to the *qnōmā*. No one will give a name to something

⁶⁰ J.B. Segal, *Edessa the Blessed City*, p.88: (Ephrem) "was a scientist as well as a theologian, and he had high regard for the learning of others, even of his enemies...". *Ibid.*, p.167: "an aspect of his writings that has been rarely noted, its scientific bent". Segal points out a few examples (pp.167-168); but it is interesting that those scholars who see an anti intellectualism in Ephrem have so far neglected this Ephrem.

which has no *qnōmā*. Here Ephrem is speaking about ‘name’ in the proper sense, differentiating it from ‘word’, ‘language’, ‘concept’, ‘pigment’, etc. We can speak of anything as a notion or fiction, giving any kind of name. But there are also names which are used because these names are based on *qnōmā*. *Qnōmā* is thus the ‘root’ (*‘eqqārā*) of names in Ephrem’s view. Here we can observe the dynamic movement of revelation: *qnōmā* serves as the root of names; names are what we have as *galyātā*. But *šrārā* comes to us in and through the revealed and revealing names. The names are the means of revelation of meaning. Names are audible to the ears just as portraits are visible to the eyes. One cannot accept just names apart from *šrārā* because there is an underlying root - *qnōmā* manifesting *kyānā*. *Šrārā* has to be found in so far as it is revealed in and through *galyātā*, and not in *kasyātā* to which we have no access. Provided we accept that *galyātā* constitute the means for God to speak to us, names are meaningful and theological language is possible. If we fail to ‘see’ both (with physical eyes) the created universe, and (with the mental ‘eye’) interpret the types and symbols which proclaim the Creator we cannot listen to God’s symbolic speech audible in Nature; if we fail to ‘hear’ (both physically and intellectually) the *galyātā* which are provided by Scripture, we cannot see the self-revealing God in Scripture. The ‘key’ to these two treasuries of our knowledge about God is the incarnate Son. If one fails to perceive the pedagogical purpose of *galyātā* he is left stranded, having forgotten the ontological chasm; and such a person places God either only on our side of the chasm or only on the other side of the chasm, thus making God either a creature (emanation, pantheism, Arianism, etc) or an unknown God (Gnosticism, Marcionite Stranger god, etc). Either way it is ‘denial’ (*kāpōrūtā*) of the real God and the

creation of non-existing other-gods. The real God is a self-revealing God; He is not entirely a Hidden God in the sense that He did not remain hidden: He is revealed in what is revealed (*galyātā*). He is hidden in what is hidden (*kasyātā*). No one can scrutinize the divine names and reach God's *qnōmā*. But one has to accept the divine names and appellations, though these are *galyātā*; *šrārā* cannot be rejected or accepted apart from *šmā*, because *qnōmā* binds *šrārā* and *šmā* together, and names are thus revelatory in character.

Ephrem introduces his favourite example of 'root' (*'eqqārā*) and 'fruit' (*pērā*). Sometimes he may alternate between root and 'tree' (*īlānā*) for Father. Why was the Son so called if He was not really the Son of the Father? The name 'fruit (of that tree)' cannot be given if there was no fruit to that particular tree. Whether the Arians like it or not, the name Son has *šrārā* (reality, identity, real existence, etc) because of its *qnōmā* (being the Son) which is undeniably connected with the *kyānā* (nature) of the Father. If there is *šrārā* behind the name Father it is because there is also *šrārā* behind the name Son. The Son is 'distinct' (*prīš* or separate) from the Father as fruit and tree are not the same. The Son is 'mixed' (*hlīt*) with the Father as fruit and its tree. The 'mixture' between the fruit and the tree is not between the fruit of one species with a tree of another kind. Whatever the tree is, so also is the fruit, except that the tree is tree and the fruit is fruit.⁶¹ Ephrem cannot think of the absence of this

⁶¹ If we take *galyata* apart from the *šrārā* (*kasyātā*) Ephrem's example too can be misunderstood. The example 'fruit' and (that particular fruit's) 'tree' known only through (that particular) 'fruit' have obvious scriptural connotations. *Galyātā* are the vehicle for *kasyātā*. Names are inseparably connected with *šrārā*. Thus the concept of *galyātā* as the means of God's speaking with human beings is crucial in interpreting

‘mixture’, unlike the Arians. He asserts one will of Father and Son.⁶² Though They have only one will They have two names (that is, with two *qnōmē*, each with its own *šrārā*) but with one *Kyānā* which is that of God, though both have distinct *kyānē* (Fatherhood and Sonship) too; this separate *kyānā* is the same as the *qnōmā* of each.⁶³ Each of these names retains what is its own and what is not of the other. The name Father retains the Glory (*Īqārā*) of the name Father. The Son’s name retains His generation (*mawlādā*). The Son’s generation is revealed in the name ‘Son’ and thus it is part of *galyātā* just as is the Father’s name. Denial of the Son’s *šrārā* (*mawlādā*) after accepting the Son’s *šmā* amounts to the denial of Father’s name and Glory. If the Son is not Son of the Father, then the Father is not Father of the Son, and hence Arianism, as Ephrem understands it, is equally an attack against the Divine Glory underlying these names.

Why divine names serve as *galyātā* is explained thus: the name Father is really the indication or predicate (*šuddā ‘ā*) of the Father; the name Son is the explanation or commentary (*puššāqā*) concerning the Son. For Ephrem these and similar proper names of God are not notions or empty words from which we work out our ideas about God, but realities from

Ephrem. This explains the great freedom of theological language in Ephrem. He can use any meaningful word to describe God because every meaningful word or image is *galyātā* portraying *šrārā* though there is no absolute transparency.

⁶² *Jn* 4:34, 5:17-20, 30, 6:38-40, 7:17 and similar texts may be in Ephrem’s mind.

⁶³ *Kyānā* of God is common; but the *kyānā* behind the name Father is the distinguishing *qnōmā* of the Father; so too the Son’s *kyānā*. See above *HdF* 59:5.7 in Chapter IV. Here is another example of Ephrem’s unsystematic or elastic use of terms which may confuse us. See below n 68.

which the names and notions proceed. So Ephrem has no difficulty in accepting God's proper names as they are revealed.⁶⁴ Revelation of God's proper names explains itself, and it is also the starting point for theologizing. The revealed names serve as commentaries just as an artist's mind is interpreted in and through the portrait on the canvas. Thus revealed names are *galyātā* as well as *kasyātā*. They are *galyātā* in so far as they are meaningful terms in human usage; they are *kasyātā* in so far as they are divine proper names and not human names borrowed by God. Though we see the canvas and the picture on the canvas, the mind of the Artist is beyond the chasm. Even the picture itself is two dimensional: an aspect of belonging to *galyātā* and another of belonging to *kasyātā*. That is to say, an onlooker can see the picture on the canvas; understand something - not everything - about the picture. The absolute invisibility (incomprehensibility) of God makes even this as a very feeble and imperfect comparison. Ultimately God alone can know Himself as He is or how He is. All that we know is that He is because this was given to us by Him.

All descriptions or statements (*šarbē*) about Father and Son have an ordering (*tukkāsā*) which is clear in and through these very names. The two names cannot be understood as one by concealing any part of the other; whatever the *šarbā* of each of these names, they cannot be concealed; nor can the *šarbē* of both be the same, though both are related. Acceptance of the one means the acceptance of the other and rejection of the one is also rejection of the other. According to Ephrem, the *šarbē* of the Son are revealed in the Prophets, though explanations of these are

⁶⁴ Ephrem cannot think of the names 'Father' and 'Son' as 'borrowed names'.

preserved in *rāzē*. These *rāzē* are always pregnant with meaning and hence have to be accepted for what they are with due caution and respect. But he does not rule out a well-balanced or ‘measured’ inquiry and interpretation of *rāzē*. The value of *rāzā* is not in the *rāzā* itself, just as the value of a portrait is not in the canvas itself. But apart from the canvas there is no portrait, though the canvas is not the portrait. Rejecting *rāzā* is in fact rejection of meaning and reality which is inherent in it as something belonging to *galyātā*. If one breaks the mirror so as to reach the reality even the reflection of reality is lost. So by denying the *galyātā* (depiction of *rāzā*) simply as *galyātā* we reject even the *kasyātā* revealed therein, because one who destroys the canvas destroys the portrait as well. The identification of both in the portrait upon the canvas is clear. The canvas too has become one with the portrait.

The concept of *qnōmā* has been studied by Beck, Martikainen, Noujaim and Bou Mansour.⁶⁵ Since Noujaim has clarified Ephrem’s idea of *qnōmā* I avoid even attempting to translate the term *qnōmā*.⁶⁶ Bruns translates the term *qnōmā* as ‘person’⁶⁷ and it is a clear anachronism. Later he translates *kyāne* as ‘persons’.⁶⁸ Between the two *qnōmē*, two

⁶⁵ See above n. 48.

⁶⁶ G. Noujaim, “*Essai sur quelques aspects de la philosophie*”, pp.30-43; Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, pp.8, 20, 159, etc: ‘*hypostasis*’. But because of the later controversies surrounding the word *qnōmā* it is perhaps better to leave the term without translating it into non-Ephremic categories.

⁶⁷ P. Bruns, “*Arius hellenizans?*”, pp. 37-39. Elsewhere Bruns agrees that *šmā* is ‘person’. See idem, *Das Christusbild*, pp.155–156. But should one translate *qnōmā*, *kyāna* and *šmā* as person?

⁶⁸ P. Bruns, *Das Christusbild*, p.39 n 96. Bruns is right in taking *qnōmā* and *kyānā* in the same sense, but it will not work always in Ephrem. See above n 63.

names, Father and the Son there is a single *ḥaylā* and love, and hence if They exist They exist together as what They are. If there is the name fruit (the Son) and no *qnōmā* (unique and concrete identity) of the fruit it is the same as calling a tree by the name of a special root revealed only in and through the fruit which it did not bear! For Ephrem this is pure contradiction and a denial of sound reasoning. If the tree has only a name devoid of *qnōmā* this is possible. But if the tree has its own existence both in name and in *qnōmā* the fruit too exists not only in name but also in reality (*šrārā*). Existing in *šrārā* of its own is identified as *qnōmā* here.⁶⁹ If the fruit exists only in name and the root (of the fruit) is existing in *qnōmā* it is the same as saying that *šuqrā* (falsity) is *šrārā* (reality), since the fruit is said not to exist in reality, whereas the root (of that fruit known only through that fruit!) does exist in reality. Thus it makes no difference whether you deny the *qnōmā* of the Son and accept the *qnōmā* of Father, or are denying both *qnōmē* and contradicting yourself. According to Ephrem this is precisely what the Arians do.

If the Father has no Son He has no *qnōmā* of the Father and we still have to search for someone else who is God and not this creature who pretends to be God by borrowing our names 'father' and 'son'. But if the Father is trustworthy, true and real (*šarrīr*) He exists as Father not only in name but also in *šrārā*. When the Father and the Son are existing each in His *šrārā* we can speak of Them as having two *qnōmē*. The *qnōmā* of the Father is not the *qnōmā* of the Son, though both *qnōmē* are related and united. This union or mixture is not the after-effect of the two *qnōmē* coming together. If They exist They exist as Father and Son, which

⁶⁹ Clearly this is the reason why Beck identified both concepts. But existing in *šrārā* is not the only meaning of *qnōmā*.

are Their proper names. These two proper names are only a consequence of Their two *qnōmē*. So Ephrem writes in *SdF* II: 663-666 that through the name ‘Father’ we learn about the Father; through the appellation ‘Son’ we are instructed about the Son. These two names being God’s proper names are clear in themselves without scrutiny and hence sufficient for our instruction.

Ephrem is not short of arguments against someone, if there is anyone, who argues that there is no need for names at all. Without names there is no knowledge, no description (*šuddā‘ā*), but only confusion and ignorance. The names are always descriptive and they indicate the reality in words; when they are divine proper names they arise from the divine *qnōmā* and cannot be denied without denying the *qnōmā* of God. If there is no ordering (*tukkāsā*) as regards names because of the removal of names and appellations then we encounter a dead end in theological language as there is no branch of knowledge possible without the narration of realities and expression of concepts with the help of names/words. We discern and distinguish by means of the names we use. Without this discernment there is no knowledge also about the God whom we confess. The two names - Father and Son - are like two lights. In this light the darkness that eclipses discernment from hearers has disappeared. Voice (*qālā*) rises up (*dānāḥ*) instead of light; the sense of hearing substitutes for that of the eyes. In *SdF* II:659-662 and 680 Ephrem brings together at least four biblical allusions.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Gen* 1:3,16; *Ex* 34:29-35; *Job* 38:7; *2 Cor* 3:13-16. There is an interesting archaic exegetical tradition in Syriac sources based on *Gen* 1:3 and *Job* 38:7.

The names of the Father and the Son are sufficient for our knowledge. Normally behind every name there is a visible face (*parśōpā*) which is different from another face. One should not search for the *parśōpē* of the names Father and Son as if we could not recognize them from Their names. In fact Their names have become *parśōpē* as far as we are concerned. Just as human beings distinguish one another by means of the face, so the names Father and Son serve as distinguishing ‘faces’. We do not always need to inspect faces in order to recognize even fellow-human beings. When our friends or relatives are far away we have no difficulty in recognizing them (in our minds) as we hear their names. Their faces are far away from us; but their names are near to us. Thus appellations substitute ‘faces’ even in the case of human beings. The names are able to substitute for ‘pictures’ (*ṣūrātā*) of those behind these names. As we hear the names, the faces and features of those named, provided they are our acquaintances, come to our mind. The voice of someone calling those names rises up as a substitute for light; just as we see their faces with our eyes we grasp the picture without the help of physical sight. The ‘images’ (*ṣalmē*) behind the names are discerned with the help of the ear (hearing the names) instead of seeing the *ṣalmē* with our eyes. The ears are nearer to the names (that is, to the voice of someone uttering those names) when compared with our eyes. Where our eyes fail to reach we can still reach with our ears. The *qālā* of names cannot reach the eyes; but it serves as light (so is like *denḥā*, ‘epiphany’) for our ears, which in turn work to create the portrait our mind needs in order to recognize faces. Thus divine names are an essential means for our knowledge of the invisible God. God’s names are revealed to us so that we may learn about God through them. In other words, divine names and titles serve as icons. We hear the names or

words of a description, and the faces and pictures behind those words are portrayed in our heart.

NAMES ARE BOUNDARIES

*SdF IV:29-66, 129-144*⁷¹

29

You have heard that God is God;
 Know yourself⁷² as a human being!
 You have heard that God is creator;⁷³
 How someone (clay-) formed⁷⁴ can search Him out!

33

You have heard about God that He is Father;
 From His Fatherhood know His Begotten!
 But if the Father is the Begetter
 The Son who is from Him, He begot from Himself,

37

Your questions shall not divide⁷⁵
 The One Begotten who is the Only-Begotten.
 You have heard about the splendour⁷⁶ of the Son;
 You shall not tarnish it with your scrutiny.

⁷¹ *CSCO 212 Syr 88*, pp.32-33, 35.

⁷² *da'napšāk*.

⁷³ *'abōdā*.

⁷⁴ *gbīlā*.

⁷⁵ See E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.47 n 4.

⁷⁶ Beck translates *zahyūtā* as 'der (sündenlosen) Reinheit', based on *HdE* 3:13 and 26:4. But in *Ephraems Reden*, pp. 58-59 Beck understands it as 'der Herrlichkeit', and his comment, 'Es ist aber wohl von dem Glanz zu verstehen, der während des irdischen Lebens Christi von Zeit zu Zeit durchbrach (Taufe, Verklärung) und seine Gottheit verriet', is noteworthy.

41

You have heard about the Spirit that It⁷⁷ is the Holy
Spirit;

Call It by the name which they called It.

You have heard His⁷⁸ name; confess His name!

For you to pry into Its nature is not allowed.⁷⁹

45

You have heard: Father, Son and Spirit;

Through the names get⁸⁰ the *qnōmē*.

It is not that They are (just) intermingled names;

In reality⁸¹ They (are) Three, intermingled.

49

If you confess (only) Their names,

But confess not Their *qnōmē*,⁸²

⁷⁷ lit. 'she', 'her' in these lines.

⁷⁸ If we read the last two lines in the light of the preceding and following stanzas, once again the shift between plural (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and singular (He) underlines Ephrem's Semitic mind. See above n 49. But this line can be referring only to the Holy Spirit and in that case the shift between feminine and masculine is interesting; or the point for feminine is missing/has been lost.

⁷⁹ The unsearchable nature of the Holy Spirit is dealt with also in *HdF* 29:5 and 59:3-9.

⁸⁰ *qnī*: hold, gain, possess, acquire. E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.47: 'Mit den Namen lerne auch die Dinge kennen!'; idem, *Ephraems Reden*, p. 58: 'Durch die Namen lerne die Dinge kennen!' How far can we 'know' the *qnōmē* of God's three names mentioned here unless we 'confess' or 'recognize' the names as such? The *qnōmē* are there in the names because these are God's proper names. Ephrem is arguing against those who separate between the divine proper names and divine *qnōmē*!. So Beck's translation misses the point. Morris translates the term *qnōmē* here as 'Realities'. See J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.399 note a.

⁸¹ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.47: 'durch die Wirklichkeit'.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 47: 'ihre Ding(lichkeit)'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.399:

You have become a worshipper in name (only)
But in fact a denier (*kāpōrā*).

53

Where there is something which does not exist in
*qnōmā*⁸³

(Is only) an empty name,⁸⁴ set forth in the midst.
Anything whose *qnōmā*⁸⁵ does not exist
Even its appellation (*kunnāyēh*) is void.

57

The *qnōmā*⁸⁶ teaches you this,
That it IS reality (*šrārā*), IS something.
For it IS something, we know;
(But) how it is, we do not understand.

61

It is not the case that, because you have known that it
IS,
You have also understood how it is;
Nor again, because you have not defined Him⁸⁷
Should you also deny that He IS.

‘Their Subsistencies’.

⁸³ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.48: ‘nicht in einem (objektiven) Ding existiert’. Here Beck understands *qnōmā* as real or objective existence.

⁸⁴ *šmā spīqā*. Inside such a name there is nothing. Thus *qnōmā* would be the ‘content’ or concrete meaning of the name when it is not a *šmā spīqā*!

⁸⁵ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.48: ‘Bei etwas ohne Ding (lichkeit)’.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.48: ‘Das Ding belehrt dich darüber, dass etwas wirklich existiert’.

⁸⁷ *bad-lā sayyektāy (hi)*: ‘because you have not put Him within limits’.

65

For these two are blasphemy:

Either to leave off (God) or to scrutinize!

129

The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

By Their names They are comprehended.

Do not concentrate on⁸⁸ Their *qnōmē*;⁸⁹

Meditate on Their names.

133

If you pry into the *qnōmā*,⁹⁰ you will be lost;

But if you believe in the name you will be saved.

Let the name of the Father be a boundary⁹¹ to you;

You shall not cross beyond to scrutinize His nature.

137

Let the name of the Son be a wall⁹² to you;

You shall not cross beyond to scrutinize His
generation.

Let the name of the Spirit be a fence⁹³ to you;

You shall not enter for investigating Him.

⁸⁸ ponder over, scrutinize, seek after.

⁸⁹ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.50: 'ihre Inhalte'.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.50: 'den Inhalt'. Here (*SdF* IV:131-133) Beck's translation of the term *qnōmā* gives the Ephremic sense. In these verses *qnōmā* is the 'content' that is inside the name. Name is an outer layer that contains the *qnōmā*. Outer layer is *galyātā* but the inner one is *kasyātā*.

⁹¹ *thōmā*.

⁹² *šūrā*.

⁹³ *syāgā*.

141

Let the names be boundaries (*tḥōmē*) for you;
 With the names confine your questions.
 You have heard the names and the reality;
 Turn yourself to the commandments.

The Three Names are revealed to us and as we are ‘clay-formed’ (*gbīlā*) we cannot search out God who is the Maker (*‘ābōdā*). Scrutiny will only tarnish the splendour of the Son. We have already heard the names of God and by confessing the names we learn what we should do. One should hold the *qnōmē* of the Father, Son and Spirit in these very names. One cannot believe in Their names apart from their *qnōmē*. These Three are not just three names which are intermingled. Their intermingling is in Their reality and the intermingling of the names is only an expression of what is already there in Their reality. Acknowledging Their names and rejecting Their *qnōmē* makes one a worshipper only in name; he is a worshipper in name, but through his action of not confessing the *qnōmē* he is a denier (*kāpōrā*) of God. What makes these names God’s names is their *qnōmē*: they are not separate or just an empty name (*šmā spīqā*). Names are said to be empty when there is no content and meaning. In other words an empty name is a concept, a fiction; it can be an idea that our mind creates and which exists in our mind, but not in reality as it has no *qnōmā*. *Qnōmā* is not just what is opposed to the non-existence. An empty name is a kind of hindrance, something placed in our mind because we want to explain the *qnōmā* and the name with the help of ‘a name’ (word) which has no content as such. Where there is no *qnōmā* an appellation is ‘void’, but it is helpful for describing something which has both name and *qnōmā*. *Qnōmā* tells us that it is *šrārā*, is something and not another

thing. We know the 'that it is', but we do not know the 'how it is' of God's *qnōmē*. We cannot insist that, since we do not know the 'how', it does not exist as it, whatever the mode of its existence. We cannot put a boundary (definition) around God's *qnōmē*.⁹⁴ Ephrem points out two blasphemies: on the one hand deserting God because one cannot place God within limits with his words or understanding; or, on the other hand, presuming to scrutinize God as if God were also a creature. A God who is fully within our understanding is no God.

The names Father, Son and Spirit are not empty names - words which the human mind created to explain certain notions. So through these revealed proper names we know God, though it is not a defining and absolute knowledge. These names are the means for reaching whatever we can reach. Leaving aside these names and concentrating on just the *qnōmē* is of no use. Ephrem's advice is that we should be content to meditate on the divine names. Believing in the Three names is our salvation; if we try to pry into the divine *qnōmē* we will perish. Another dimension of the ontological chasm is hinted at here. The name 'Father' is the boundary (*tḥōmā*) of the Father's *kyānā*. The name 'Son' is the wall (*šūrā*) for us as regards his being generate (*yaldā*) from the Father. The name 'Spirit' is the fence (*syāgā*) for us. No created being is able to cross this boundary, wall and fence. Any attempt to transgress these limits will end up with falling into the chasm instead of reaching God. In order to reach God we have to follow the divine pedagogy. Transgression of boundaries is impossible where God is involved: what really happens is scrutiny and blasphemy. These boundaries are not to protect God's *qnōmē* from our intellectual attack, but to protect us from falling into

⁹⁴ See above Chapters I-II.

the chasm. Elsewhere Ephrem speaks of using divine names as safe havens for our ship of faith.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE REVEALED SIDE IS IGNORANCE OF THE HIDDEN SIDE

*SdF VI: 259-296*⁹⁵

259

The Only Begotten (*īḥīdā*) has two sides
One hidden and the other revealed.
That revealed (side) is not to be concealed
And that hidden (side) is not to be scrutinized.

263

Satan who is most crafty of all⁹⁶
Has removed us from the revealed side
And choked us in (the ocean of) the hidden side
Lest we be saved through that revealed side.

267

Look at the Father, His Begetter
For He also has two sides.
That He exists, everyone has understood;
But His hiddenness is inscrutable.

271

His revealed side is very much revealed
For even 'fools' have recognized that He exists.

⁹⁵ *CSCO 212 Syr 88*, p.47.

⁹⁶ *ṣni' men kol*. In Gen 3:1 the serpent is described as '*rīm men kolla(h) ḥayūtā*'. In Eph 6:11 we hear about the *ṣen'ātā* of Satan.

Hidden is the hidden side
For not even the Watchers comprehend 'How He IS'.

275

And not only that (divine) Majesty
Which is thus incomprehensible,
But (also) all creatures,
Each of them has two sides.

279

That is: one side is 'revealedness'.⁹⁷
And the other side is 'hiddenness'.⁹⁸
For their *qnōmē*⁹⁹ are comprehensible,
Their boundaries¹⁰⁰ are incomprehensible.

⁹⁷ *galyūtā*.

⁹⁸ *kasyūtā*.

⁹⁹ E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p.68: 'ihre Ding(lichkeit)'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.413: 'themselves'. This is a rare text where Ephrem admits the comprehensibility of *qnōmē*, presumably since he is talking of *beryātā*, but not as 'how it is'. What we grasp is the outer layer. He does not admit of a 'defining' comprehension of *qnōmē* as it clear from the next line.

¹⁰⁰ *sākayhēn*. E. Beck, *CSCO 213 Syr 89*, p. 68: 'ihr ganzes (Wesen)'; J.B. Morris, *Select Works*, p.413: 'the ends of them'. Beck's translation of these two lines in *Ephraems Reden*, p.11: 'Ihre Dingheiten (*qnōmayhēn*) werden erfasst, ihre Ganzheiten (*sākayhēn*) dagegen nicht'. Beck adds the following comment (*Ephraems Reden*, p.11): 'die Geschöpfe sind als objektiv existierende Dinge erkennbar, nicht aber ihre Wesenheiten. Das hier neu auftretende Wort *sākā* steht für *kyânā* = Wesen(ssstoff) . Die verbindung zwischen beiden kann durch das Verbum der gleichen Wurzel, *sayyek* = umgrenzen, definieren, hergestellt werden. Denn zu der Stelle (*SdF*) IV 57ff. mit der Definition des *qnōmā* = objektiv existierendes Ding lautet die Fortsetzung: (IV 61 ff) Nicht hast du, weil du erkanntest, dass etwas ist, auch erfasst, wie es ist. Und nicht wirst du umgekehrt, weil du es nicht definierenkonntest, leugnend sage: es ist überhaupt nicht.'

283

If it is indeed (the case) that creatures
 Have these two sides:
 They are hidden while revealed;
 They are known while not known;

287

How much more as regards the Maker,
 And concerning the Begotten of that Creator,
 Two (kinds of) knowledge are to be found!
 One which is revealed and the other which is hidden:

Hier bezieht sich das definieren (*sayyek* - *sâkâ*) auf das Wie-sein (*kyānā*), dem das Da-sein (*qnōmā*) gegenübersteht. Bei *qnōmā* tritt somit die gegensätzliche Doppelbedeutung von 'konkret existierendes Einzelding' und 'Wesenheit' ganz schroff zu Tage, so schroff, das man sich fragt, wie sich Ephräm überhaupt mit einem derartig widerspruchsvollen Begriff hat abfinden können. Zur beantwortung dieser Frage kann darauf verwiesen, dass Ephräm als Semit wenig sinn für ein geschlossenes System besass, man kann auch den halb poetischen Charakter der Reden betonen'. Beck arrived at an apparent contradiction in Ephrem's thought only because he misinterprets Ephrem, applying a Greek understanding of a 'konkret existierendes Einzelding' in contrast with a 'Wesenheit'. But such a contrast between a thing and its nature is unthinkable for Ephrem. This is an interesting example which proves how important it is not to understand Ephrem in Greek categories of thought. There is no radical separation between 'Da-sein' and 'Wie-sein' in Ephrem's mind though he says that we may know the one and not the other; such a partial knowledge is not resulting from the object of knowledge, but because of the subject of knowledge. The subject of knowledge is only a creature. So only the Creator can know the ultimate 'How' of any existing thing. What underlies Ephrem's mind is not the impossibility of knowing something, but the impossibility of knowing it fully, finally and absolutely. The realm of knowledge is ever growing and it is never final.

291

Knowledge about His 'revealed state'

But lack of knowledge about His 'hidden state'.

For as much it is knowing that 'He IS'

It is not knowing 'How He IS'.

295

There is a Way concerning His 'revealedness',

But only 'wandering'¹⁰¹ concerning His 'hiddenness'.

Once again Ephrem verges on his own theory of knowledge. He does not deny that the intellect is able to grasp some knowledge about a reality that is already 'visible' or made visible (revealed) to us. But our intellect does not have the last word even about created realities which we can see with our own naked eyes. Even every created reality has two sides: a revealed state and a hidden state. By revealedness Ephrem means what is 'visible' to the intellect either through sense perception or through intuition or investigation. The reality is always something more than the intellect can fully comprehend. The intellect can know what is knowable. The ultimate and inner dimension of reality is hidden. Human intellect cannot have an exhaustive approach as it investigates something. There is always something more to wonder about. The 'visible' dimension is all that the intellect is able to find out. The 'invisible' (hidden) dimension never ceases to exist even if our intellect does not perceive it often. All that the intellect can arrive at is the 'revealedness' of reality. The *qnōmē* of reality are understood in so far as the *qnōmē* are visible or revealed. *Qnōmā* is not

¹⁰¹ *urhā* in the previous line and *pehyā* here take us back to the theme of Royal Highway. See above Chapter II.

‘is-ness’ as opposed to non-existence. Any attempt to fix the exact meaning of *qnōmā* in Ephrem’s writings is to go beyond Ephrem’s time. In Ephrem it is a fluid concept which involves real and inner identity expressing itself through existence that is individual, unique and in itself. It is the ‘content’ of the outer layer we call ‘name’. ‘Is-ness’ of *qnōmā* is known through the real and proper name either given to it by the intellect or revealed to the intellect. Name-giving involves wisdom and a given name is thereby able to convey the knowledge - however imperfect it is - as regards the revealed side of reality.

Ephrem’s adversaries can easily grasp the logic behind his thought, as it is not only the Creator who has two sides: one ‘revealed’ and the other ‘hidden’. Even those created things which we are able to see with naked eyes are two-dimensional: they are only partially known to the human intellect because there remains something hidden and what is still hidden about that reality is not comprehended by the mind. What the intellect has already learnt about it belongs to *galyātā*; what is not yet known belongs to *kasyātā*. There is always the possibility of knowing more because of the *kasyātā*; but it does not mean that the intellect is always able to reach such a stage that it knows absolutely everything about a reality. This is to admit that the human intellect has its limitations, and naturally the knowledge it has achieved or which it can still achieve is not absolutely infinite. It can go on searching and finding more about *galyātā*, but it should never neglect the *kasyātā* that remain, thinking that there is nothing more to learn. This is what Ephrem calls a ‘measured’ investigation. Our knowledge is always able to grow; it is partial, never absolute, perfect, final and finished.

There is an important distinction which Ephrem takes for granted: created realities are either visible or invisible; visibility and invisibility are of two kinds: (1) something which is visible or invisible to our physical eyes; (2) anything visible (comprehensible) to the eye of our mind. Even what is fully visible to the naked eyes is only partially visible to our mind; many things which are invisible to our physical eyes are even more partially comprehended (seen) by the mind. What lies beyond the reach of human senses physical or intellectual - is said to be 'hidden'. This 'hiddenness' of reality is like a veil that is gradually being lifted, but never in an absolute sense. The 'hiddenness' has different layers: (1) 'hiddenness' of physically visible things once the human intellect tries to grasp them; there is always more and more to find out and what is not yet found out is 'hidden'; (2) 'hiddenness' of the invisible (immaterial or spiritual) beings because of our physical nature; (3) 'hiddenness' of the 'Hidden One' because of His 'hiddenness'. The first type is that of *galyātā*; the second is that of *galyātā* and *kasyātā*; but the third type of 'hiddenness' is the ontological chasm which tells the difference between Creator and creature.

The terms *galyātā* and *kasyātā* are used by Ephrem to refer to many things and with different shades of meaning. Ephrem does not exclude *galyātā* and *kasyātā* even in the case of things which are apparently only *galyātā* (that is to say, created and physically visible things). All the Ephremic texts where the terms *galyātā*, and *kasyātā* occur are collected and their different meanings are systematically summarized by Noujaim.¹⁰² Only a poet-theologian like

¹⁰² G. Noujaim, *Anthropologie et Economie de Salut chez saint Ephrem autour des notions de Ghalyata, Kasyata, et Kasya*, (Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, Rome 1980), pp.2-121. This forms the first

Ephrem can construct a whole system of thought using such simple words occasionally varying their meanings but never excluding the original word meanings.

What is revealed about God, whether as types and symbols in Nature, or as proper names and borrowed names in Scripture, is the subject-matter for Ephrem's theology. Created realities (including the human nature of Jesus) become the means of God's descent. Nature and Scripture form the canvas or *galyātā* of God; what is revealed is to be found in the types, symbols and language we can easily see or hear everywhere in Nature and Scripture. Ephrem is unable to draw a line between 'sacred' and 'secular', 'spiritual' and 'material' as completely opposed realities. For him the very fact that God created at all is the starting point of revelation. That is why Nature itself, with all created realities, directly or indirectly speaks about God in types and symbols. But types and symbols are to be carefully observed and interpreted with 'discernment'; this observation and interpretation does not exclude human intellect as far as Ephrem is concerned. His vision of the human being is integral and not fragmentary; hence he cannot envisage any radical opposition (though there is healthy tension) between 'reason' and 'faith', as if there was a division in the human being. According to Ephrem this tension is really between reason and love.¹⁰³ The Creator is revealed to creatures using

chapter of Noujaim's unpublished (except a small section) dissertation. Noujaim's analysis of *galyātā* and *kasyātā* is fundamental in interpreting Ephrem's system of thought. Unfortunately he did not go far enough to explore the concept of the ontological chasm. See above n 16. I regret that I did not have access to this masterly work until I was about to complete this chapter.

¹⁰³ R. Murray, "St Ephrem's Dialogue of Reason and Love", *Sobornost/ECR* 2:2 (1980), 26-40.

the language of creatures; for God it is a great descent; but for creatures it is a great ascent as God is revealed in this way. Thus our knowledge about God is always using our terms because they have already been used by God as a means of revealing Himself to us. Thus in Ephrem's thinking the validity of theological language cannot be denied without denying the validity of human language itself. But one who sees only the canvas and not the portrait and to some extent the idea conveyed by the artist through the picture, he fails to see the self-revealing God. Ephrem would argue for a movement from the canvas (*galyātā* which are only *galyātā*) to the picture (*galyātā* which were once *kasyātā* but are now revealed and hence having two dimensions), and from the picture to the mind of the artist, which is not revealed except through *galyātā* (the picture) on *galyātā* (the canvas). Ephrem does not and cannot envisage an opposition between canvas, picture and mind of the artist. The canvas (of Nature and Scripture) becomes important because of the picture (revelation in and through it), and the picture itself is important because it reveals (since *kasyātā* are depicted on *galyātā*) the Hidden (the God beyond the chasm). A keen observation, 'measured' scrutiny and a balanced interpretation is all what Ephrem advocates.

Divine revelation is compared to the Way that leads to God. This Way is about the revealed aspect. There are two kinds of knowledge corresponding to the two dimensions of divine reality: knowledge about the revealed side (*galyātā*) and lack of knowledge about the hidden side (*kasyātā*). Scrutinizers go astray over God's hiddenness; Ephrem is more concerned with God's revealedness. The revealed state is the Way to take. A total comprehension of any reality - even a created reality - is impossible. From the revealed, and by

means of the revealed, we know about God. So Ephrem does not have the concept of ‘natural’ versus ‘revealed’ knowledge about God. Even what is usually described as ‘natural’ is ‘revealed’ from Ephrem’s point of view. Our knowledge of God is the result of revelation and it is not our natural achievement. Even our nature is created by God and what appears natural to us ultimately depends upon our Creator. Ephrem makes clear his position: not concealing the revealed side and not scrutinizing the hidden side. The revealed side is the means for our salvation. It is probable that Ephrem is also reminding his audience about the revealed ‘side’ of Christ, the Way to Paradise.¹⁰⁴ The revealed side of the Only Begotten is the climax and culmination of salvation history. It is only the revealed side that we should look for. There are two ways of ‘wandering’ from the path of salvation: concealing the revealed side of the Son and scrutinizing His hidden side. Concealing the revealed side is denying or rejecting the means for re-entering Paradise. Scrutinizing the hidden side is what the Arians did in Ephrem’s time. Satan is most cunning in removing believers from the revealed side so that he can drown them in the great sea of the hidden side. In short, Ephrem is warning his audience against prying into the other side of the ontological chasm. If, on the other hand, the believer looks for the revealed side, then everything that is revealed is clear enough without any scrutiny. Revealed names help us to know God. But this knowledge is that ‘He is’, and not ‘how He is’. The ‘how’ is not understood even by angels. Divine names form the boundary of *qnōmē* which is beyond human scrutiny. The *qnōmē* are comprehensible in so far as we can comprehend the outer layer known as ‘names’.

¹⁰⁴ R. Murray, “The lance which re-opened paradise a mysterious reading in the early Syriac Fathers”, *OCP* 39 (1973), pp.224-239, 491.

Presuming to go inside the fence of divine proper names is audacity and blasphemy. What lies behind divine proper names is beyond scrutiny; but that something lies behind the divine proper names is not at all beyond our comprehension.

EPHREM DOES NOT TRANSGRESS THE BOUNDARY OF SCRIPTURE: AN APOLOGY

HdF 64:10-12¹⁰⁵

10

It is possible that someone may ask me:

‘From where have you yourself learnt about the
nature of the Lord of All?’

Far be it that I should even have acknowledged that I
know!

His Scriptures have indicated concerning Him
And because it is right that we should believe God
I have listened and have believed Him
And through my faith I have weaned
My audacious investigation.

11

But I have never wandered off after human beings
To say as they say; for I have seen that
They have called Our Saviour with other names
Which are not written (in Scripture).
I have left aside what is not written

¹⁰⁵ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, p. 200. This text contains Ephrem’s autobiographical notes.

And proceeded with what is written
Lest because of those which are not written
I lose what is written.

12

He created water and gave (it) to the fishes for use;
He assigned the Scriptures and gave (it) to human
beings for benefit.

And they bear witness one another;
And if the fishes cross the boundary (*tḥōmā*) of their
course,

- Even their jerking is an affliction!
And if human beings cross the boundary (*tḥōma*)
(given in) the Scriptures
Their investigation is death.

Ephrem is defending his theology of divine names against some hypothetical or real (Neo-Arian) critic. If we cannot know ‘how’ God really is, how can we speak about God at all? What names can we use legitimately and without controversy? As we have pointed out Ephrem does not like the Nicene term *homoousios* because such a term is non-scriptural and hence open to criticism.¹⁰⁶ The critics may take it as an opportunity to add any appellations they like to Christ. Ephrem seems to be making both an autobiographical and an apologetic note about his own incompetence in great philosophical matters on which the adversaries dispute.¹⁰⁷ His own competence to speak about God is not the result of following masters who teach human wisdom; nor did he ever boast that he has known the nature of God. Ephrem’s

¹⁰⁶ See above *HdF* 52:14 in Chapter IV.

¹⁰⁷ A reference to Neo-Arians. We note a similar apology, against Bardaisanites, in *Pr Ref*; see below Appendix.

investigation is weaned to maturity by his faith, by his listening to Scripture.¹⁰⁸ This sort of investigation is the keynote of Ephrem's theology. What he rules out is audacious and presumptuous rationalistic scrutiny which does not follow from faith and 'listening' to Scripture. Unlike his critics Ephrem can make a claim against them: he has not gone after any philosophical school leaving aside the Scripture. This claim does not mean that Ephrem was altogether unaware of the philosophical trends among his contemporaries; rather, he has decided not to cross the boundary of Scripture because he was afraid of losing what is written in Scripture if he went after what is not written there. The scriptural dimension is more crucial than the speculative dimension. Both kinds of investigation are not on the same level and Ephrem does not regret not leaving the scriptural appellations in favour of non-scriptural ones. Going after human masters - who teach things not revealed in scripture - is not Ephrem's approach. What is written is more important than what human teachers teach about what is not written.

If we apply in this context what Ephrem wrote about the ontological chasm, *galyātā* and *kasyātā*, we get a more or less systematic picture: what is written is *galyātā*; what is not written is *kasyātā*. Human speculations and scrutiny about the *kasyātā* of God are not warranted, whereas what is 'revealed' is trustworthy because God is trustworthy. Fishes cannot survive outside their realm; even if they try to spring occasionally to find out what is beyond their proper realm it is a painful effort, and it can be detrimental; the sooner the fish reaches water again the safer its course. Transgression of the scriptural boundary means to go beyond the proper scope of theological investigation. The thick veil of the ontological

¹⁰⁸ We find a similar mentality in Aphrahat, in *Dem* XXII: 26 (Parisot I, 1049): *d-talmīdā 'nā da-ktābē qaddīšē*.

chasm is lifted in and through the Scripture by God and hence there is enough scope for ‘fishes’ like Ephrem! The comparison of Scripture to the ocean/water and human beings to fishes serves also an allusion to the confession of baptismal faith. Just as fishes can live only in water believers can survive only in ‘scriptural’ waters. But when he compares human beings with sailors the ocean becomes the type of the incomprehensible *kasyātā* of God¹⁰⁹ and divine proper names are said to be safe havens for the ship of faith. But even there the baptismal symbolism is not entirely absent.

BAPTISMAL FAITH IN THE NAMES

HdF 65:5¹¹⁰

Who would, when he is baptized, dispute and
 repudiate
 Something in which he is baptized?
 But he cannot break off,
 Because it is not possible to baptize without the
 Names
 Of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.
 And while standing by itself
 In every respect the Word¹¹¹ has had experience
 Of those who are audacious.

¹⁰⁹ In *Oration* 38 Gregory of Nazianzus, describing the incomprehensibility of the Father, speaks of “the ocean of undefined and undetermined essence”. See V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, p.23; see above Chapter I n 51, Chapter II n 107.

¹¹⁰ *CSCO* 154 Syr 73, pp.201-202.

¹¹¹ Ephrem is referring to the baptismal proclamation of faith in a definite formula involving the Three Names, which he too accepted at his baptism long ago and hence stood the test of time. The ‘Word’ can stand also for Christ and in that case the ‘audacious’ are contemporaries of Christ; otherwise, they are Ephrem’s contemporary Neo-Arians. Ephrem is probably over about sixty when he wrote *HdF* and hence he can draw on his own experience with the ‘audacious’!

The Three Names are beyond dispute according to Ephrem. Otherwise we repudiate those very names upon which our baptism stands. These three names are revealed in Scripture and accepted by every Christian at baptism. After accepting the names there is no way of rejecting them without rejecting one's baptism itself. At baptism the Three Names cleanse us;¹¹² so doubting or repudiating the Three Names after baptism is defiling oneself. In Ephrem's time baptism was received only after proper preparation by 'listening' to the Scripture and sermons explaining various scriptural themes. Baptism was the climax of a long process, and it was a real and personal proclamation of faith; hence his audience could easily grasp the significance of the baptismal confession of faith. One's own baptismal proclamation itself is able to stand the test of audacious scrutinizers. Thus even afterwards it serves as the criterion against those who desert or attack the baptismal faith.

NAMES FROM THE MIRROR OF SCRIPTURE

*HdF 67: 8-10*¹¹³

The Scriptures are set as a mirror;¹¹⁴
 He whose eye is clear (*šapyā*) sees there
 The image¹¹⁵ of Truth.

¹¹² See *HdF* 66:6.

¹¹³ *CSCO 154 Syr* 73, p.207.

¹¹⁴ *maḥzīta*.

¹¹⁵ *šalmā*. Possibly an allusion to Gen 1:26. The relation between *šalmā* and 'Truth' must not be forgotten. The value and worth of *šalmā* depends on this relationship.

9

The image of the Father is set there
 The image of the Son is depicted there
 And (also) of the Holy Spirit.

10

The Names of the Three are set
 One after another in faith
 For baptism.

We mentioned that ‘listening’ to Scripture was important in preparation for baptism. Baptism itself is based on Scriptural names; Scripture is given to us as a mirror¹¹⁶ of Truth. God is speaking from behind and through the mirror of Scripture.¹¹⁷ The names of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are set out in Scripture and accepted at the baptismal profession of faith. In the above cited simple verses Ephrem’s theological depth may not be readily apparent. So let us apply Ephrem’s ideas about *kasyātā* and *galyātā* to find out the coherence and profundity of Ephrem’s theological understanding. Scripture is *galyā* because the whole Scripture is in our human language and we have seen elsewhere Ephrem’s much repeated and favourite illustrations of that kind of language borrowed in Scripture. Since Scriptural language is *galyā*, plain, manifest, visible and revealed to human understanding, Scripture is like a mirror reflecting some familiar human image. The Scriptural image is *galyā* as it is often from our realm; but it is also *kasyā* as everything there is not *galyā*. In so far as that image

¹¹⁶ E. Beck, “Das Bild vorn Spiegel”, p.6. See above Chapter III n 25.

¹¹⁷ See above *HdF* 31:1-11 in Chapter III.

is borrowed from our realm or put on us, and our understanding is able to grasp it, it is *galyā*. But in so far as the picture is related to its original it is *kasyā* for our understanding. The names Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *galyā* and *kasyā* at the same time. If we reject the *galyā* we reject the *kasyā* as *kasyā* is revealed only in and through *galyā*. Thus *galyā* becomes the vehicle and mirror of *kasyā*.

The picture we have in Scripture is only a reflection of truth. There is no reflection in the absence of reality; but our access is always to the reflection. Though the reflection is not truth itself it is the reflection of truth and hence behind this *galyā* there is *kasyā*. Since a human being is able to grasp only the pictures 'visible' to his intellect even the divine proper names are made 'visible' - revealed - to us. It is the reflection of reality and truth in the mirror of Scripture. At the same time God's proper names remain 'invisible' to our mind if we do not see the revealed dimension of Scripture, because we leave the *galyā* and run after the *kasyā* which is not on our side of the chasm and which is not given to us; if something is not given to us it is for our own protection and benefit. The veil of *kasyātā* (reality, mystery, etc) is being lifted gradually and progressively through the *galyātā* (reflection, word, icon, etc) according to our ability to grasp them. *Galyātā* serve as pictures to our mind since *kasyātā* are invisible to it. They are visible images and reflections and audible names and language of *kasyātā*. Truth is reflected in the mirror of Scripture and we have to turn our eyes and ears towards it. Even for the most eloquent investigator there is an ultimate boundary of silence as regards *kasyātā*. About the ultimate boundary or chasm Ephrem reminds us again in:

HdF 67:5¹¹⁸

Let stillness be the boundary¹¹⁹ for the eloquent,
And let silence be the boundary for the
investigators,¹²⁰
As regards things hidden (*kasyātā*).

The believer has to set sail in the ship of faith on the ocean of Scripture;¹²¹ this ship needs safe havens on its journey towards knowledge about God. These safe havens are the divine names and appellations we find in Scripture. The sailor in the ship of faith can make the voyage safely from one safe port to another. But the sailor has to be careful, warns Ephrem in:

*HdF 69:7*¹²²

Without (what is) in His Scriptures you shall not
 proceed on His (Sea)!
 As He has multiplied His havens between His floods,
 Give thanks to His name!

*HdF 70:6*¹²³

Sail from haven to haven, O weakling!
For if the Sea becomes overpowering
The nearby haven is like a place of refuge.

The divine names thus serve in our search for knowledge about God. Without the safety provided by the divine

¹¹⁸ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.207.

119 *thōm* .

120 *bāṣōyē.*

¹²¹ See *HdF* 69: 6.

¹²² *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, p.213.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.215.

appellations our ship of faith is unable to make the voyage in the sea of God which is reflected through the mirror of Scriptures. Safe havens are set between divine torrents and tides. Human weakness needs various kinds of similitudes (*demwātā*). By means of those similes, the divine Majesty came down to us. This is the divine pedagogy that should encourage and guide us,¹²⁴ writes Ephrem in:

*HdF 75:21-22*¹²⁵

21

Do not be sluggish, O (human) mind!
Construct spiritual bridges¹²⁶ and cross
Towards the side of your Creator!

22

O son of a servant,¹²⁷ make wings for your self,
(Out of) the Holy Scriptures, so as somehow to arrive
At the side of the Son of Your Lord.

Thus Scripture can provide us wings to reach the side of Christ. The ocean crossed by the ship of faith, the distance flown over by Scriptural wings, and the abyss crossed by spiritual bridges are no indications that we ever cross the ontological chasm; our knowledge of God and our crossing to His side are only possible with the help of the *galyātā* provided by God. Spiritual bridges mentioned here are divine appellations as we understand from the next texts.

¹²⁴ See *HdF* 75:18-20.

¹²⁵ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, p.231.

¹²⁶ *gašray rūḥā*.

¹²⁷ *bar 'abdā*; 'abdā is Adam, the created servant to whom the Creator entrusted His creatures.

EPHREM'S DEVOTION TO THE NAME *JESUS*

HdF 5: 6-7, 14¹²⁸

It is not possible for the creature
 To be compared with the Creator.
 Not even the names
 Of the two are equal;¹²⁹
 And more than the names
 The *qnōmē*¹³⁰ are not equal.
 The Lord willed in His love
 To give His names to His servants.
 Priests and kings put on¹³¹ your titles
 Because of (Your) grace.
 Both Moses¹³² and Joshua¹³³ (put on) Your names.

7

It is a merciful Lord
 Who Himself also put on our names,
 Even to a mustard seed,¹³⁴
 Humbling Him self, was He compared.
 He gave us His names;
 He accepted from us our names.
 His names made us great;
 But our names made Him small.
 Blessed is anyone who has spread out

¹²⁸ *CSCO* 154 *Syr* 73, pp.18-19, 21.

¹²⁹ *the same, alike, etc.*

¹³⁰ See E. Beck, *CSCO* 155 *Syr* 74, p.15: 'die Gegenstände'; idem, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.9, 14.

¹³¹ See *HdF* 63: 8.

¹³² See *HdF* 61:10; *Ex* 4:16.

¹³³ *HcH* 4:18; *HdN* 1:31, 26:11. *Išo* 'bar-Nun and *Išo* '.

¹³⁴ *Mt* 13: 31; *Mk* 4: 31; *Lk* 13: 19. These texts are combined with *Jn* 12:24 as Beck has pointed out.

Your good name over his own name
And adorned his names with Your name.

14

Close is the Son to His Father
Through glory as well as through name.
Just as He is close in (these) two
He is not distant in a third (matter).
As the Father is unsearchable
The Son is inscrutable.¹³⁵
He who wishes to scrutinize the First-born
Is wishing to scrutinize the Father.
Scrutiny about the Begotten is a bridge:¹³⁶
For, if anyone passes over it
He is crossing over to scrutinize the Father.

*HdF 6: 17*¹³⁷

O Jesus, the glorious name!
The hidden bridge¹³⁸ which causes to pass over
From death to life.
Towards you I have come and stood (still)
At the *yod*, Your (initial) letter, I have stayed.
Be a bridge to my word

¹³⁵ This line is not found in Beck's translation.

¹³⁶ *gašrā*.

¹³⁷ *CSCO 154 Syr 73*, pp.30-31.

¹³⁸ *gašrā kasyā*. Perhaps this is a source for the later iconographic traditions which depict Christ standing between life and death and dragging Adam and Eve from the mouth of death. In *SdDN 4* we read about the same theme: 'This is the Son of the Skilful Carpenter, who mounted (constructed?) His cross over the all devouring Sheol and caused humanity to pass over to the abode of life ... Praise to You who made the cross a bridge over death so that souls might pass over it from the abode of the dead to the abode of the living'.

That it may pass over to Your Truth.
 Make¹³⁹ Your love a bridge for Your servant.
 Through You let me pass over to Your Father!
 Let me pass over and say: Blessed is He
 Who mitigated His might through His Son!

Here we can again find the key ideas underlying Ephrem's system of thought: Divine names are *galyātā* and natures underlying those names are *kasyātā*. As belonging to *galyātā*, name is an image, a reflection in the mirror; as *kasyātā*, nature is truth, which is hidden in itself but revealed in reflection. He who does not accept the names as mirrors of reality fails to grasp the reality revealed in and through the names. Thus one can speak of an Ephremic theory of divine names. If we scrutinize God's proper names we presume to scrutinize God Himself and thereby perish in the ontological chasm. If we scrutinize God's borrowed names we scrutinize ourselves and not God, because the *qnōmē* and *kyānē* of God's borrowed names do not belong to God's nature. The danger in scrutinizing even the borrowed names is that one may forget the fact that these are only our proper names and not God's and fail to see the real God.

The exchange of names between God and human beings works in a twofold manner. By putting on divine names we become great; by putting on our names God becomes small. Divine descent is in order to accomplish human ascent, and this is a process started by God because of our being created and His being our Creator - our being created by Him is also our becoming His *qenyānē*. Creatures are not abandoned by the Creator as Marcionites might argue.

¹³⁹ *gšōr*.

The relationship started by God as Creator is always there. Ephrem's theology of incarnation is summed up in the idea of divine-human exchange of names. When God put on our names it was for our benefit; when we were allowed to put on His names it was also for our benefit. Thus incarnation becomes the revelation of God's goodness/grace (*taybūtā*). Names are like mantles of sheepskins with which we cover our body. The incarnate Son came down to our level wearing the mantle of human names so that human beings may accept Him into their midst. Some (the Arians) thought He is only a fellow-sheep (a human being). But wolves tore away the human mantle (body) of the Son and the divine glory was exposed. So Arianism is understood as a second crucifixion.

The Son is the bridge to the Father; the name is bridge to the *qnōmā*. There is no way to transgress the boundary using our bridges. We have to make use of spiritual bridges which are revealed in the Scripture; we can also construct more bridges using Scripture as wings to fly over. This is not for audacious scrutinizers whose way ends abruptly at nowhere. But for others there is a splendid bridge: Jesus is the glorious name and hidden bridge of salvation. In *HdF* 6 the alphabetic acrostic runs thus: *aleph, beth, beth, beth, beth, beth, gamel, daleth, he, waw, zain, heth, teth, teth, yod, yod, yod*. At the third *yod* Ephrem is reminded of the name *Išō'*, and stops the hymn with a reflection on the name Jesus. The name Jesus serves as the last haven of safety. It is the bridge between death and life. The very initial letter *yod* is the place where one's ship of faith should halt. The threefold repetition of *yod* seems to be deliberate. *Yod* is the tenth letter of the alphabet and its numerical value is ten; so the letter *yod* is a great symbol as Ephrem explains in the following texts.

SYMBOLISM OF *YOD* AND THE NAME *JESUS**HdN 26:12*¹⁴⁰

Let the tenth day give praise through its number.
 For *Yod* is the letter of the beautiful name of Jesus.
 Its numerical (value) is ten; it is like a lord,
 Returning¹⁴¹ the numbers,
 For when the number has climbed to ten
 It turns itself down to begin again from one.
 O great symbol¹⁴² which is in (the name) Jesus
 Whose power¹⁴³ is restoring (all) creatures!

*HdN 27:2, 5, 10-13*¹⁴⁴

2

Yod is placed at the beginning of Your name,
 It is placed at the tenth in the month of Nisan.
 On the tenth You entered the womb:¹⁴⁵
 In the symbol of the perfect number is Your
 conception.

5

The name of Joseph was not able
 To be Your father, for it was feeble.
 Your name gave him the letter *Yod*¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ *CSCO 186 Syr 82*, p.136.

¹⁴¹ 'restoring', 'changing', 'bringing back', etc.

¹⁴² *rāzā rabbā*.

¹⁴³ *d-ḥayleh*.

¹⁴⁴ *CSCO 186 Syr 82*, pp.137-139.

¹⁴⁵ See *Ex 12:3.6*; *HdN 5:14*; S. P. Brock, "Passover annunciation and epiclesis: some remarks on the term *aggen* in the Syriac version of *Lk 1:35*", *NT 24* (1982), pp.222-233.

Your name strengthened¹⁴⁷ the name of Joseph to be
Your father.¹⁴⁸

10

Also John did not baptize
His body without His power.
The *Yod* carried the name of John¹⁴⁹
As the power of Jesus¹⁵⁰ carried John.

11

Now, if He bestowed the beauty
Of His letters to their names,
If He mixed His glorious beauty with their names,
How much more did He mix
His hidden power¹⁵¹ with their names!¹⁵²

12

And just as the number
Has only ten steps¹⁵³
The creation has six sides:
The height and depth and the four sides¹⁵⁴
Are (all) filled with You!

¹⁴⁶ *Yausep*.

¹⁴⁷ *ḥayyel*.

¹⁴⁸ Mary is at a loss: How should she call Jesus? Her love for Joseph prompts her to call Jesus *Son of Joseph*. See *HdN* 2: 6, 13, 22; 6:1-2; 23:4; *Lk* 3:23; *Jn* 1:45; *Mt* 1:18.

¹⁴⁹ *Yohannān*.

¹⁵⁰ *ḥayleh d-Išo'*.

¹⁵¹ *ḥayleh kasyā*.

¹⁵² E. Beck, *CSCO* 127 *Syr* 83, p.126 n 8: *their bodies*.

¹⁵³ *HdN* 26:12.

¹⁵⁴ east, west, north and south. See *Pr Ref* II, pp. cxxii-cxxiv.

13

Yod the letter of Jesus our King,
 Is the queen of all numbers¹⁵⁵
 On its fullness depend all reckonings
 As all meanings¹⁵⁶ are mixed in Jesus.

The letter *yod* represents the perfect number because its numerical value is ten. When we reach the number ten we have to return to one in order to continue the counting. So ten is the queen of numbers; all other numbers return while ten remains as the climax.¹⁵⁷ For Ephrem thus *yod* which is ten is the great *rāzā* that is in the name Jesus. The power (*ḥaylā*) of Jesus restores all creatures. Jesus was conceived on the tenth of Nisan. *Yod* was given to Joseph's name because Jesus will also be known as the Son of Joseph. The *yod* of Jesus' name can also be found in the name of John who was to baptize Jesus. Mary received *mim* from Jesus' name *Mšīḥā*.¹⁵⁸ First two letters of Jesus' full name - *Yod* and *Mim* - are carrying the names of Joseph and Mary because their names are unable to carry themselves. Thus *Yod* gave the real meaning and power to their names. Most probably Ephrem has in mind the *Yod* of the name *YaH Maryā*,¹⁵⁹ which also has *Yod*

¹⁵⁵ *HdN* 26:12.

¹⁵⁶ *kol re'yānīn*. See J. Payne Smith, *Dict*, p.546; E. Beck, *CSCO* 187 Syr 83, p.126: 'jeder (menschliche) Geist'. Here Beck's translation is inexact. *Re'yānā* can be mind, intellect, way of thinking, opinion, sense, meaning, conscience, etc. In stanzas 14-22 Ephrem explains how all meanings are mixed in the name Jesus which starts with *Yod* the perfect number.

¹⁵⁷ The Pythagoreans had a similar view which was perhaps known to Ephrem. See R. Waterfield, trans., *The Theology of Arithmetic: On the Mystical, Mathematical and Cosmological Symbolism of the First Ten Numbers: Attributed to Jamblichus*, (Grand Rapids 1988), pp.109-115.

¹⁵⁸ *HdN* 27: 6-8.

¹⁵⁹ *Ex* 15: 2. See above *HdF* 44: 4 in Chapter III.

and *Mim*, and thus pointing to the mystery of the incarnation. Ephrem identifies *YaHWeH* with Jesus the Messiah, though the latter is not identified reversely. Ephrem's repeated use of the term *ḥaylā* in *HdN* 26:12, 27:6-10 and the verb *ḥayyel* in *HdN* 27:5 are significant in the light of the term *ḥayleh kasyā* in *HdN* 27:11. The mention of *conception* on the tenth of the first/seventh month Nisan is another indication in *HdN* 27:2 which highlights the indwelling of the *Ḥaylā* from above in Mary's womb¹⁶⁰ and which was revealed later at the Jordan. The *ḥaylā* of *Yod'* was not revealed through the name of *Jesus bar-Nun*; but his name depicted the mystery that was revealed through Jesus' birth.¹⁶¹ Mary does not dare to call Jesus with any particular name because 'ten thousand names would not suffice' Him.¹⁶² Isaiah's prophecy¹⁶³ about the child whose name is a great symbol (*rāzā rabbā*) is fulfilled in Jesus. The name '*amman-ū-ēl*' is a mixture of two names.¹⁶⁴ Our names are mixed with His name in the Church, because in the incarnate Son God put on humanity. Those born in baptism are mixed into His body which is the Church.¹⁶⁵

It is not at all the so-called magical power of the name that is meant by Ephrem. There is no magical power hidden

¹⁶⁰ This idea we find also in *HdN* 5:13-14.19-24. The *Ḥaylā* of the Most High dwelt in Mary's womb and that is why Jesus is called Son of God. See S.P. Brock, "The Lost Old Syriac at Lk 1:35 and the Earliest Syriac Terms for the Incarnation", *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text. and Transmission*, W.L. Petersen, ed., (Notre Dame 1989), pp. 117-131.

¹⁶¹ *HdN* 1:31-32; *HcH* 4:18.

¹⁶² *HdN* 6:2.

¹⁶³ *Is* 7:14.

¹⁶⁴ *HdN* 25:5. '*amman-(h)ū-El*: El (God) is with us (= our names). See *HdF* 41:6.

¹⁶⁵ *HdN* 25: 5-6.

in the name of Jesus. But Jesus' name itself is divine power because He is the incarnation of the *ḥaylā* of the Most High. The name Jesus is perfectly identical with the person of Jesus. ʾĪšo' bar-Nun had to wait until the arrival of Jesus to know what his own name depicted as *rāzā* in advance. It is the name of Jesus that supplies meaning and power to our names. The name Jesus is understood in the context of salvation history and the mystery of incarnation. By giving meaning to all other names it remains identical with the name 'with us is God'. This is the 'mixing' of God with human beings, exchanging the mantle of names. So Christ is called 'the garment of our glory',¹⁶⁶ which restores all creation just as the *Yod* returns all other numbers.¹⁶⁷ Thus members of the Church are restored creation whose names are mixed with Christ's - which take us to the core of Ephrem's theology of divine names. This theme has its soteriological as well as its ecclesiological connotations, as Ephrem continues to argue in the texts discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁶ *HdN* 17:6. See *HdP* 2:7, 6:9; *HdV* 35:2; *Epiph* (?) 13:1-3; S.Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp.66-72.

¹⁶⁷ See above *HdN* 26:12; 27:12-13.

CHAPTER VI IMPRINT OF THE LIVING NAME ON US

*HcH 22:3-7, 10*¹

3

Valentinos stole sheep from the Church
And called them after his (own) name;
The Quqite called them by his name;
Crafty Bardaisan stole them.
And they made them as though the sheep were (held)
in common.²

Marcion leaving his sheep desolate;
Mani fell (upon them) and seized some of them:
One mad (dog) bit another!³
They called the flock by their (own) names.
Blessed is (He) who expelled them from His house!

¹ *CSCO 169 Syr 76*, pp.78-81.

² That is, wandering sheep which do not belong to a particular owner and hence 'common' for all.

³ Heretics borrow from fellow-heretics and hence heresies spread like rabies in Ephrem's view. This sarcastic remark reflects the situation of Edessa in the 360s.

4

The Arians went even further astray,
 And the Aetians who became subtle,
 And the Paulinians who were perverse,
 And the Sabellians who plotted evil,
 And the Photinians who feigned piety,⁴
 And the Borborians who were defiled,
 And the Kathari, because they considered themselves
 pure,
 And the Audians, they slid down losing their footing,
 And the Messalians⁵ who are unrestrained.
 Let the Good (One) bring them back to His fold!⁶

5

Behold their hands ‘slipped away’⁷ from all
 And there is no grip to give a hold.
 They turned round (and) called us Palutians⁸
 But we have ‘escaped’⁹ thus and cast it¹⁰ away.
 Let there be anathema on anyone who is called after
 the name of Palut
 And not with the name of *Mšīḥā*.¹¹
 The crucible¹² of the anathema exposed those

⁴ ‘who became hypocrites’.

⁵ This is the earliest reference to this group.

⁶ *l-dayre(h)*. The ‘enclosure’ for sheep was the term later used for a ‘monastery’ in the Syriac tradition. See *Thes Syr* I, 850-857.

⁷ *plāt*.

⁸ *Pālūtāyē*.

⁹ *plātan*.

¹⁰ That is, the name *Palutians*.

¹¹ The term *Mšīḥā* is crucial in Ephrem’s argument because of its association with *mešḥā* (oil) of baptism.

Who did not wish to utter the anathema.
Blessed is (He) by whose anathema they are exposed!

6

And also, Palut did not want
Anyone to be called after his name;
And if he had been alive (today) he would have with
every kind of anathema
Anathematized them because of this.
For he was the disciple of the Apostle
Who put on sorrow and was bitter
Against the Corinthians who had abandoned
The name of Christ (*Mšīḥā*) and were called
By the names of human beings.¹³
Blessed is He who has the true (name)!

7

And a teacher who adds
Nothing vile or hateful
To the teaching of Christ (*Mšīḥā*)
His disciples are Christians (*Mšīḥāyē*).
But if he adds a little deceit
The name of Christ (*Mšīḥā*) leaves him
And by the name of a weed¹⁴
His disciples too are called.
For falsehood does not agree with truth.
Blessed is (He) who established us in His truth.

¹² 'Proof', 'criterion', etc., (of the name of Christ's sheep is: *Mšīḥā-Mšīḥāyē*).

¹³ 1 *Cor* 1:12ff.

¹⁴ *zīzānē* is Ephrem's term typical for any 'heretic' - a 'weed' in the field of wheat. See *Mt* 13:24-30.

10

How despicable is gold to our King
 When his portrait is not imprinted on the money!
 On human beings who are greater than all (creation)
 Our Saviour imprints His beauty;
 (He) who believed in the name of God
 Has received the imprint of God.
 But if he is called after the name of a (fellow) human
 being
 He has received a human imprint
 Which is rejected by the Living Name.¹⁵
 Blessed is He who chose us through His name(s?).

In *HcH* Ephrem is applying his theory of divine names in a concrete and contemporary situation in Edessa. The sheep of Christ are distinguished by the appellation *Mšīḥāyē* (Christians). All other groups who are claiming to be Christians contradict themselves by calling themselves by the name of one or another fellow human being. Heretics are called after their masters and not after Christ. Ephrem gives a series of heretical groups (most probably known to him in Edessa and nearby villages). By their appellations, named after false teachers, they prove to be ‘weeds’ in the field and not ‘wheat’.¹⁶ The attitude of the apostle Paul towards the Corinthians is mentioned for two reasons: the situation in Edessa was a reflection of the ecclesiastical groupings in Corinth. Secondly Palut, just like Paul, came to the rescue of the mainstream Church separating it from the different groupings. Palut is often described as the bishop who first led

¹⁵ *šmā hayyā*.

¹⁶ See above n 14.

‘the orthodox’ Christians against ‘the heterodox’,¹⁷ certainly with the help of Antioch because Palut’s Episcopal consecration is associated with the See of Antioch. *The Doctrine of Addai* does not give any doctrinal reason for Palut’s Antiochean connection. But it is probable that different heretical sects had taken over all the Episcopal sees in the Edessan region and Palut emerges to restore the ‘orthodox’ minority and seeks consecration from Antioch. This might be the reason why the legends underlying *The Doctrine of Addai* neglected the ‘un-orthodox’ elements in the history of the churches in the Edessan region. Because of this new initiative by Palut the heretics were calling ‘the orthodox’ group under him ‘Palutians’, a name unacceptable and wrong in Ephrem’s view. Ephrem’s play on Palut’s name in stanzas 5-6 is indicating how real Christians ‘slipped away’ from heretics to join the fold of Christ. The name of Christ is given to His followers. But if any Christian teacher adds falsehood to truth the name of Christ deserts him; thus his followers have no claim to be called after Christ. This is a clear reference to the ‘un-orthodox’ groups of Edessan region. In stanza 9 (not translated above) Ephrem gives a practical example. Coins are issued only with the true royal stamp of the monarch. Not even the chief commander would dare to put his stamp on the coin. If anyone puts any portrait on the coin other than that of the king, he is punished with death. Christ imprinted His name upon us (at our baptism). Heretics imprint their own portrait on their followers. The Living Name of Christ imprinted upon the Christians shows the ownership and whose property they are. There is a

¹⁷ G. Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai*, (London 1876), p.50; see W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Earliest Christianity*, (Philadelphia 1979), pp.17-24. Though Bauer’s understanding of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ is not fully acceptable Palut’s role in the mid-third century Edessan Church is clear.

criterion for detecting true teachers from false ones. The servants do not work in their own name; they work for their master's name, as is explained by Ephrem in the following texts.

NAMED AFTER THE MASTER

HcH 23:3-6, 9-10¹⁸

3

Joab had subdued the city,
Which was a royal city.
And lest it might be called after his name,
Though Joab the commander had conquered it,
He sent for David who hastened
So that as king he might enter it (first);¹⁹
And his name would be known as if he himself
conquered it.

Joab labours like a servant,
While the name of the king gains renown.
To You be praise from true (Christians)!

4

The apostles and prophets who were
Princes and commanders,
They too toiled and laboured, taught and trained,
And subdued fortified (cities) and towns.
Prophets and apostles weary themselves
While the name of God gains renown.
Our Lord worked and toiled and instructed;

¹⁸ *CSCO* 169 *Syr* 76, pp.87-89.

¹⁹ *2 Sam* 12:26-31.

But the name of the false²⁰ may gain renown,
 For some (people) are called after their names.
 Blessed is He through whose name they are exposed!

5

The 'sons of Bardaisan' must be asked:
 How and why is it that
 They are designated by the name of Bardaisan;
 And what is the reason for (this) denomination;²¹
 Whether it is (the case) that they are born from him
 Just as the *Ebrāyē* (Hebrews) are from Eber.²²
 But (if) it is because they are his disciples
 The appellation of his name reproves (them)
 For he made up²³ an evil teaching.
 Blessed is He who exposed their deceits!

6

However, not everyone who makes disciples²⁴
 Calls his disciples with his (own) name.
 The apostles instructed²⁵ the nations
 But none (of them) designated (them) with his own
 name.

With that Name which He²⁶ taught them²⁷
 In the same Name he²⁸ baptized them.²⁹

²⁰ That is, the deceivers (heretics) who plunder Christ's branded sheep;
 see Jn 10:1.8.

²¹ *kunnāyā*. For Bardaisan his name is *šmā*; but for his followers it is only
kunnāyā.

²² *eber* - *ebrāyē*. See *Gen* 10:21, 11:14-17.

²³ lit. mounted, set in motion.

²⁴ teaches.

²⁵ made disciples of.

²⁶ Christ/apostle.

²⁷ apostles/gentiles. Reference to *Mt* 28:19-20?

²⁸ apostle.

In that Name (in) which he baptized them,
 The same (Name) he caused them to worship.
 This same Name He³⁰ gave to all.
 Blessed is He whose Name (is) worthy of all
 (honour)!

9

Let us indeed make it clear (and simple)³¹
 So that it may be heard even by the deaf.
 You, I make the mediator
 You choose, O hearer!
 What is noble(r) and praise worthy,
 That you should be called *Mšīḥāyā* (Christian)
 Or be designated 'Marcionite'.
 Should they call you 'Christian' (*krestyānā*)
 Or 'Daisanite' weed?³²
 Blessed is He whom all long for!

10

Both when Bardaisan was not yet (born)
 And Marcion('s name) was not renowned,
 Let us go (back) to the first (Christians)
 Who are older than Marcion;

²⁹ gentiles.

³⁰ Christ/apostle. The name *Mšīḥā* (Christ) is passed on to the *Mšīḥāyē* (Christians) through the apostle. Christ passes His name through His apostles to His followers. This happens through baptism. The baptized are branded *Mšīḥāyē* and the reason is the name of Christ.

³¹ See Beck's note in *CSCO 170 Syr 77*, p.85 n 8.

³² *daiṣānāyā zīzānā*. Play of the name Bardaisan (son of Daisan). Daisan was a river that flew through Edessa often bringing flood and disaster, and weeds after the flooding season. The flood of river Daisan brought innumerable variety of seeds of weed and this was well known to every resident of Edessa. The heresy of the son of Daisan is like this natural calamity.

And let us see how they were designated,
 Those first churches;
 And let us be designated with that Name;
 And let us put off and cast away the appellations,
 The names which (came) afterwards.
 Blessed is He who is handed down with His names.

Ephrem is making clear the distinction between apostles and 'weeds'.³³ The apostles do not give their names to Christ's flock whereas 'weeds' pass on their names to their followers whom they steal from among Christians. Apostles work for God's name whereas 'weeds' propagate their own names among Christians. In fact the heretics are 'deceivers' because they appropriate God's branded flock.³⁴ For Ephrem the appellation of a heretic's name over a group who claim to be Christians is the clearest proof that they are not the real Christians who are branded with Christ's name and no other name. The followers of *Mšīḥā* are *Mšīḥāyē*. True teachers are like the apostles who worked for the name of Christ and not for their own names. Thus the name of Christ is the unifying factor and the distinguishing mark among all Christians. In stanza 9 two terms - *Mšīḥāyē* and *Kreṣtyānē* - apparently refer to Syriac and Greek speaking Christians. It is also possible that the term *Mšīḥāyē* was more popular among native Christians of Edessa at the time of Marcion and Bardaisan. As Ephrem clearly indicates in stanza 10, he is drawing attention to the early appellation of the first Christians (of Edessa?) who lived before the birth of Bardaisan (A.D.154) and before Marcion became famous (c.A.D. 144). In stanza 9 the parallels between *Mšīḥāyē* and

³³ *HcH* 23:1.

³⁴ See *Jn* 10:1-16.

Marqyōnāyē, *Kreṣtyānē* and ‘Daisanite weed’ may be another historical indication. Marcion³⁵ flourished before Bardaisan³⁶ and it is possible that by the mid-second century Marcionites had reached Edessa. Though we do not have definite historical evidence to show that *Mšīḥāyē* existed side by side with Marcionites in Edessa before the birth of Bardaisan, such a possibility cannot be ruled out. The parallel between *Kreṣtyānē* and the ‘Daisanite weed’ may be a similar indication that by Bardaisan’s time (+ 222) the term *Kreṣtyānē* came into more popular use also among Syriac speaking Christians.³⁷ But later on there is a struggle to shed the name Palutians because of Palut’s apparent connection with Greek Antioch. If this assumption is historically tenable one can easily understand the legends underlying the *Doctrine of Addai*. These stories deliberately try to assert some orthodox and apostolic origin of Christianity in Edessa. In bilingual areas the new term *Kreṣtyānē* got popularized especially after Bardaisan and before Palut; but in more rural areas the term *Mšīḥāyē* was continued even in Ephrem’s life time. For Ephrem it is significant to show that the first Christians (of Edessa?) were called after *Mšīḥā* and not after any true apostle, let alone some false teacher like Marcion or

³⁵ See J. Quasten, *Patrology* I, pp.268-272.

³⁶ H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, pp. 213-227.

³⁷ According to Brock there is a similar situation in the Persian Empire where the term *Kreṣtyānē* came to be in use because of Shapur I’s deportation of Greek speaking Christians before mid-third century. See S. Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac”, in *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ch 4, pp.91-95. It is probable that such a double appellation for Christians existed also in Edessa before the time of Palut because of the bilingual situation. After all *Mšīḥāyē* and *Kreṣtyānē* are respectively the Syriac and Greek appellations for the followers of Christ.

Bardaisan. The heretical teachers, as well as some Christians who are designated as weeds, came only afterwards. The name *Mšīḥāyē* is handed down by *Mšīḥā* through His apostles who laboured as servants for their Master's name. Is Ephrem speaking about *Mšīḥāyē* in general terms or is he referring back to the situation in Edessa before the emergence of Marcionites and Bardaisanites? It is most probable that in mid-second century Edessa there were orthodox Christians as well as Marcionites. Until Palut became bishop of the minority orthodox *Mšīḥāyē* the demarcation between 'orthodox' and 'heretic' was not very clear. The 'tradition' about the role of Palut in leading the orthodox group is known to Ephrem.³⁸ But Palut's apparent establishment of Episcopal links with Antioch (and anachronistically even with Rome!) as described in the *Doctrine of Addai* in fifth century can be a later accretion.

THE ZEALOUS SHEPHERD/BRIDEGROOM'S NAME ON THE SHEEP/BRIDE

HcH 24: 2, 4³⁹

2

The True (Master) has commanded and warned
That they should not have a 'master' (*rabbā*) on
earth.⁴⁰

The Apostle who was afraid made haste
Lest the sheep be called after his name.

³⁸ See above *HcH* 22:5-6.

³⁹ *CSCO* 169 Syr 76, pp.90-91.

⁴⁰ *Mt* 23: 8.

4

O the true suitors (*mākōrē šarrīrē*)⁴¹

Who did not turn against the Bridegroom

When the sheep said:

I belong to Kepha, or (I am a follower) of Paul or of
 Apollos⁴²

O the sheep which ‘signed’⁴³ itself

With the names of its fellow-servants!

For the good servants feared and removed

Their (own) names from the flock.⁴⁴

And with the ‘sign’ of the Lord they ‘signed’ it

Blessed is (He) who ‘signed’ it through His apostles.

STOLEN NAMES ON THE STOLEN SHEEP

HcH 24:8-17, 20⁴⁵

8

The Greeks saw His greatness (*rabbūteh*)

And the Persians, also the Egyptians;

Their mouth renounced their idols,

And the names of their gods.

Behold, the corrupt repented and renounced

The names of their masters (*rabbānayhōn*)

⁴¹ That is, the apostles. *2Cor* 11:2 have *mkartkon* and from the context it is clear that Ephrem is alluding to this text. In *Mt* 1:18, *Lk* 1:27 we find the term *mkīrā* and in *Lk* 2:5 *mkīrteh*, referring to Mary in relation to Joseph. See *Thes Syr* II, 2107-2109.

⁴² *1Cor* 1:12.

⁴³ The use of the verb *ršm* thrice and the noun *rušmā* once in this stanza is an explicit reference to ‘signing’ at baptism which marks out Christ’s sheep.

⁴⁴ *mar’ ītā* occurs in an ecclesiological sense in *Acts* 20:28.29, *1Cor* 9:7, *Heb* 13:20, and in *1Pet* 5:2.3.

⁴⁵ *CSCO* 169 *Syr* 76, pp.92-97.

And they confessed 'the Teacher of Truth'.⁴⁶
 And behold, the weeds are called
 After the names of men who went astray.
 Blessed is He who leads back the stray ones.

9

They tarnished the Bride of the Son
 Among the Greeks; for even
 Their disciples were called
 After the names of their masters (*rabbānayhōn*)
 The Bride whose love became wanton
 Put on the names of a servant⁴⁷
 The mighty suitor was zealous⁴⁸
 Lest having become wanton she become corrupt,⁴⁹
 And he⁵⁰ cut away the names.
 Blessed is (He) who handed her over to zealous ones.

10

And if today there had been (alive)
 The apostle in a bodily manner
 He would have blotted out the memories
 Of the fraudulent (teachers) as (that) of Amalek⁵¹
 For if he did not allow the name of Simon
 To be named over the flock
 How much more he would have obliterated the names
 Of thieves⁵² who cut off and drove it away

⁴⁶ *rabbā d-quštā*: the True Master; see above *HcH* 24:2 and n 40.

⁴⁷ servants, according to ms A. See E. Beck, *CSCO* 169 Syr76, p.93 n 3.

⁴⁸ See 2Cor11:2 where we have the terms *ta'en* and *baṭnana* which are reflected in this stanza as *tan* and *tannane*.

⁴⁹ fall into desuetude.

⁵⁰ The Apostle Paul.

⁵¹ See *Ex* 17:8-16; esp.v.14.

And called it with their (own) names.
 Blessed is He who lifted it up⁵³ with His adorable
 name.

11

A Marcionite⁵⁴ who (is) blaspheming from the first
 Cannot flee from his name.
 The name proceeds to him from his sect,⁵⁵
 And the appellation from his division.
 And also a thief (is) unwilling
 To be called according to his deed.
 But by necessity he is named
 A thief according to his deed.
 The deeds make us acquire names.
 Blessed is He whose name we put on.

12

But the Holy Church is fleeing
 From the names of men,⁵⁶ my brothers!
 Of the Sabellians and the Arians,
 With the rest of those who separated,⁵⁷

⁵² *gannābē* . The same term that we find in *Jn*10:1.10 (singular), 8 (plural). See above nn 43-44.

⁵³ hung up, propped up, suspended, etc.

⁵⁴ E. Beck, *CSCO* 170 *Syr* 77, p.88: “Markion, der erste Lästere, konnte nicht dem eignen Namen entfliehen”. Beck has missed what Ephrem meant by taking *Marqyōnā* as Marcion. In *HcH* 23:9 Beck takes *Marqyōnā* as “Markionit” and there is no reason to confuse between Marcion and a Marcionite. It is a Marcionite who inherits Marcion’s name, and not Marcion himself. In *HcH* Ephrem uses the name *Marqyōn* 36 times and twice *Marqyōnā*. A Marcionite puts on the name of Marcion. By stealing Christians (the signed sheep of *Mšīhā*) Marcion (and the Marcionite) becomes a thief.

⁵⁵ schism.

⁵⁶ human names. An indirect reference to the name Palutians and the like.

⁵⁷ torn asunder (from the Holy Church).

Unwilling to be called after
 The names of their teachers,
 For they contrived to court her
 Since they perceived where her love is,
 That she was entirely hung⁵⁸ on Christ.
 Blessed is the name upon which she has adhered to.

13

Have they not read in the Apostle that he blames
 One for saying⁵⁹ 'I am (a follower) of Kepha'
 And another (for saying, 'I am) of Paul' and (of)
 Apollos.

Behold, my brothers, great grief!
 For lo, those who read⁶⁰ (it) dared to put
 Their names on the flock.
 Neither the readers were modest
 Nor were the hearers ashamed
 To be called after the name of a man.
 Blessed is the name with which we are named.

14

Come, let us see, with whom is
 The teaching of the apostles,
 Those who did not call
 The Bride of the Son by their (own) names.
 A teacher who thus puts
 His name on the sheep,
 Remote (is) his teaching from (that) of the apostles.

⁵⁸ erected, suspended on; see above *HcH* 24:10.10.

⁵⁹ See *ICor* 1:12.

⁶⁰ Beck follows A to read *daqreyn* which is supported by *qraw* and *qārōye* in this stanza itself. But *dḥabrayn* in B makes sense as fellow (sheep) who took over the flock by branding it. In *HcH* 24:4 we have this imagery as well as the term *knāwātāh* which supports B.

But who has called her with the name of her Lord,
It is by him the truth abides.
Blessed is He who made known by whom (it)⁶¹ is.

15

And also the Greek wise men,
Each of them were called
With a name,⁶² also are called (today),
Their disciples, my beloved!
Men were subject to men
And were called after their names.
And against the name Lord and God
Behold, the pagans⁶³ (are) exalting themselves.
Blessed is He who put His name upon us.

16

But an unclean teaching
They called after the name of a dog,⁶⁴
Just as, neither the Audians were
Ashamed at the name of the owl
Nor the Arians and Quqites,⁶⁵

⁶¹ That is Truth, which is identified with (the name of) the Lord and with the teaching of the apostles.

⁶² Disciples of a particular philosopher were often called after his name.

⁶³ Here *kāpōrē* stands for pagan philosophers whose disciples were called after them; also an indirect reference to pagan kings who assumed divine titles. Ephrem uses this term occasionally to mean heretics who give their names to their sect.

⁶⁴ Ephrem is criticizing the name 'cynics'.

⁶⁵ Ephrem is playing on the terms *'ūdāyē* – *'ūdā* (owl), *aryāne* – *aryā* (lion), *qūqāye* – *qūqā* (pitcher, water-pot). *Qūqāyā* means also a potter. About the Quqite sect see H.J.W. Drijvers, "Quq and the Quqites: An unknown sect in Edessa in the second century A.D.", *Numen* 14 (1967), pp.104-129; reprinted in *East of Antioch* (London 1984), ch 14.

Also their names, my beloved ones,
 Are all unclean, one more than the other.
 Blessed is the name with which we are adorned.

17

They spread out the names of wolves on the sheep
 And doves put on the name of hawks.
 The wheat left its good name
 And was called after the name of thorns.
 The Apostle rebuked the Corinthians;
 Their Lord was crucified for them,⁶⁶
 But they called themselves after the name of (fellow)
servants:
 Of Kepha and (of) Paul, the glorious (apostles).
 How much more have the pagans⁶⁷ provoked (God to
anger).
 Blessed is the name which we have confessed.

20

The apostles had preached for years
 And then others after them;
 But there were no weeds yet.
 These (weeds) which came to be afterwards
 Will tell us by whose name
 That teaching was called;
 First, Simon⁶⁸ who taught.

⁶⁶ *1Cor* 1: 13.

⁶⁷ According to Ephrem the Corinthians whom Paul scolded were far better than the pagans. The Corinthians called themselves after glorious apostles; but pagans went after a 'dog', 'owl', 'lion', 'pot', 'wolves', 'hawks', 'thorns', etc! By the term *kāpōrē* here he means both pagans and heretics at the same time.

⁶⁸ A reference to Simon Magus the first heretic (?). See *Acts* 8:9-24. In *Peshitta* the name is *Sīmon*; but here Ephrem uses *Šem'on* because he

It was not called after Kepha's name,
 And the witness is Paul and Apollos.
 Blessed be the witnesses through whom they were put
 to shame.

Ephrem makes a sharp contrast between Christ the only teacher and the false teachers. Christ appointed true apostles who worked for the name of their master. The true apostles did not hand over their own teachings or their own names. The Church is the Bride who belongs to Christ, the only Bridegroom. Christ gave His name to the Bride. The Church is the flock of Christ, the only Shepherd; each sheep is 'signed' with Christ's name and this constitutes the mark of ownership. At baptism the followers of Christ (*Mšīḥā*) receive the name 'Christians' (*Mšīḥāyē*) and there is no other identification mark for them.

The Greeks, Persians and Egyptians had their own masters and teachers once. They had their idols whom they worshipped as gods. But once they understood the greatness of Christ as 'the Teacher of Truth' they left their teachers and idols. Heretics are weeds who are designated with the names of those who went astray from the flock of Christ. But Christ brings back the stray sheep into the true fold. From stanzas 9-10 we can observe that Ephrem was aware of the situation among the Greek-speaking Christians: heresies tarnished the Bride of Christ among the Greeks. The True Master's name is forgotten by many disciples who put on the name of false masters (like Marcion, Mani, Bardaisan, etc). But according to Ephrem this present situation is only a repetition of what

wants to speak of *Šem'on Kepha* - even whose name was not allowed to be put on by Corinthians - and *Simon* who taught as the first heretic.

had happened in the time of the apostles: When the flock of Christ began to be called after the name of the servants of Christ, the apostle Paul corrected this practice among the Corinthians: Christ's is the only name that identifies Christians. False teachers are only stealing the branded flock of Christ and calling the stolen sheep with their own names. But the adorable name of Christ is the mark that properly distinguishes the flock.

Ephrem illustrates his view with an example. There is no way a 'Marcionite' can be a 'Christian' at the same time. A 'Marcionite' gets his name from Marcion whose sect and ideology he follows. The 'Marcionites' are unwilling to be called 'Marcionites'. No thief would like to be called a thief, remarks Ephrem. Like it or not Marcion is thief; so too a 'Marcionite'. Our deeds gain for us some appellations whether we like them or not. By following Christ we are called Christians. A 'Marcionite' who dislikes his own appellation cannot claim to be a Christian and still follow Marcion. Ephrem is disputing against various heretics who claimed to belong to the Church. In stanza 12 we find a reference to the return of some former heretics to the true Church; some heretics like the Sabellians, Arians and others who had separated themselves from the true Church did not want to be called after the name of heretics and hence claimed to be true Christians and true Church. But the true Church adheres to the name of Christ, Ephrem argues. The true mark of an apostle or teacher of the Church is that he too acknowledges Christ as the only true teacher. Servants look after the flock marked with the name of their master; the friends of Christ the Bridegroom do not put their own names on the Bride of Christ.

Among the Greeks wise men used to have disciples. Those disciples were called after the name of their teachers. From stanza 15 we understand that Ephrem knew at least the names of some such ‘schools’ or disciples of Greek philosophers. It is better to put on the name of Christ than that of fellow human beings. Ephrem teases the ‘cynics’ because of their name. In LXX *1Sam* 25:3 Nabal is called *kunikos*. The *Peshitta* has *kalb* (like a dog). In Hebrew the text is *kalbi* (from the clan of Caleb).⁶⁹ Ephrem plays on the names of various heterodox sects and their leaders in his own way.⁷⁰ The names of heretics are abominable. Such names are no comparison with the name ‘Christian’, which is the adornment of the followers of Christ. Heretics are like wolves who invade the flock of sheep. Both sheep and doves put on unclean names; so too wheat puts on the name of thorns. For Ephrem this is precisely what happens when Christians become followers of false teachers. The Corinthians were following good teachers like Kepha, Paul, Apollos, etc. But even that was going astray from the one and only true Teacher and His name. So Paul forbade the use of appellations based on the apostles’ names for the flock of Christ. But infidels who are called after creatures like a ‘dog’, ‘owl’, ‘lion’, ‘pot’, ‘wolves’, ‘hawks’, ‘thorns’, etc. (!), are all the more unworthy of the name of Christ.

In *HcH* 24:22 Ephrem speaks of the ‘hand (laying)’ of the apostles that hands over the ‘traditions’ (*yubbālē*). This

⁶⁹ More about ‘dog’ as abominable and at the same time sacred symbol among the Romans and ancient Semites, see W.R. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (3rd ed., London 1927), pp.290-292, 576; idem, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, pp.17, 190f, 219, 254. The Greek ‘cynics’ (*hoi kunikoi*) had their name from ‘dog’ (*kuōn*) because of their eccentric behaviour.

⁷⁰ See *HcH* 2:1, 6; 23:9.

ended among ‘the People’, with Christ having given it to the apostles. This theme is associated with the Way of the King (*‘urḥā d-malkā*)⁷¹ having milestones⁷² and inns.⁷³ Satan is the one who ‘turns away’ from the royal path. This play on Satan’s name is a familiar theme in Ephrem.⁷⁴ In *HcH* 27:3 Ephrem speaks of the use of the names of the Father, Son and Spirit as milestones ‘stolen’ by heretics.⁷⁵ Evidently Ephrem is criticizing the use of Trinitarian names by heretics (Arians) who do not accept the reality behind these names. Milestones once removed from the sides of the royal road are useless for the travelling pilgrims. Milestones are not only the Trinitarian names; any pointer to God’s Kingdom is a milestone. Ephrem points to the sign of oil, baptism, breaking the bread, the cup of salvation, and the Scripture as milestones. Heretics have all these on the desert road (leading to destruction) because they have stolen them from the royal road (leading to salvation). It seems that here Ephrem is also disapproving of the use of sacraments and Scripture among the heterodox sectarians.

The contrast between two different roads underlines Ephrem’s ecclesiological and soteriological concern in his polemics. The three stolen divine names are representatives

⁷¹ See above Ch II.

⁷² See E. Beck in *CSCO* 170 Syr 77, p.92 n 2; see above Chapter II n 74. According to Beck in *HcH* 22:8, 26:3 and 27:2-3 the ‘milestones’ and ‘inns’ are the Trinitarian names, the sacraments and the Scripture. In *HcH* 26:4 the Way is Christ Himself.

⁷³ See *HcH* 25:1, 26:1-4.

⁷⁴ *ṣtā* - *sātānā* = he who leads astray. See *HcH* 17:10, 22:2, 26:4; *CNis* 52:15-20, 54:8-9; *CGen* 2:32; *SdF* 6:167-169.

⁷⁵ In *HcH* 3:1,8 and 41:6 it is told that the heretics steal divine ‘names’ and put them on their idols. Stealing the divine names means to remove the terms from the real and only God and apply them to anything other than God. Thus, for Ephrem idol worship and heresy imply stealing divine names.

of all other divine names stolen by heretics and then erected alongside the wrong road. But in reality divine names cannot be hidden or stolen as the heretics think.⁷⁶ Truth is like a light that enlightens us and gives life.⁷⁷ The heretics also could not hide the milestones (true divine names which they too use); so they tried to give the divine names to a non-existent king.⁷⁸ Those who put on His name (in and through baptism) enter the Way to Paradise,⁷⁹ because He put on Adam.⁸⁰ Those who have put on His name, He considers as Himself.⁸¹ The divine-human exchange is a threefold process. First, the Divine Majesty put on our images (*demwātan*) and names to give us special help. As humanity rejected those images and names, God sent the First-born who put on real human limbs and thus mixed with humanity. Thirdly, in this mixing with humanity, mortal humanity receives life that is His.⁸² In other words Ephrem is speaking about the incarnation of God in human language (as Creator of Nature and as the Self-revealing One in Scripture), the incarnation of the First-born in a human body, and the divinization of humanity. The double folly of the heretics consists in the following: they mistake the 'images' of Creator as 'truth'; and the 'truth' of Our Lord as 'images'. This can be put into the following equation:⁸³

⁷⁶ *HcH* 27:3-4.

⁷⁷ *HcH* 27:5.

⁷⁸ See *HcH* 27:4. The non-existent king is the fiction of heretics; they try to call the milestones of the King by fictitious names. Ephrem is referring to the Marcionite idea of God, as well as to the Arian idea of Son: these are only fictions with stolen names.

⁷⁹ See *HcH* 26: 4.

⁸⁰ *HcH* 26:6, *HdF* 24:1, *HdP* 12:6, etc.; E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, p.79.

⁸¹ *HcH* 30:12.

⁸² *HcH* 32:9, 33-36.

⁸³ See *HcH* 35:7, 36:11-13.

Ephrem: The Creator put on human images/human language.

Our Lord put on True humanity.

Heretics: The Creator's images are truth/reality.

Christ's truth is only an image.

In other words whatever is predicated of the Creator should not be understood in anthropomorphic terms. Truth behind those anthropomorphic names and language should not be identified with 'images'. On the other hand the incarnation of the Son cannot be explained away as an 'image' or a way of speaking. Ephrem is arguing mainly against Neo-Arians and Marcionites.⁸⁴ The images (*demwātā*) predicated of God do not belong to God's very *kyānā* (nature);⁸⁵ they are our images and they belong to our proper nature. In the Old Testament there is incarnation in images; in the New Testament it is incarnation in Truth.⁸⁶

Marcion's idea of the 'Stranger' is in fact no divine name as it has no divine *qnōmā*.⁸⁷ It is entirely void and without power.⁸⁸ Marcionite views are counterfeit coins, bad metal, stolen names.⁸⁹ The Marcionites divide the unique name of God who is one with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰ There is not another Name, Being or God other than the Creator. The uniqueness of God the Creator and the incarnate Son⁹¹ is stressed against the Marcionites, Bardaisanites and Manichaeans.⁹² Mani used 'dishonourable names' for God.⁹³

⁸⁴ *HcH* 44:12, 40-56 passim.

⁸⁵ *HcH* 34: 7.

⁸⁶ See *HcH* 33:1-9.

⁸⁷ See *HcH* 41: 6, 43:21.

⁸⁸ See *HcH* 40:3.

⁸⁹ See *HcH* 41:6, 9; *HdF* 12:2.

⁹⁰ See *HcH* 49:1, 6.

⁹¹ See *HcH* 49:2-3, 7, 50:1.

⁹² See *HcH* 49:6.

The heretics are compared to ungrateful dogs that bark against their own Lord and help the wolves to plunder, and harm the sheep.⁹⁴ Bardaisan tried to imitate David in composing hymns.⁹⁵ But he is severely criticized for using the name *Ītyē* instead of reserving its singular only for God who alone is *Ītūtā* and *Ītyā*. All we know is that ‘He is’ and it is a given or revealed knowledge.⁹⁶ Here Ephrem is arguing that ultimately our God-talk is dependent on the fact that there is a God who revealed Himself that ‘He is’, and the fact that ‘He is’ is not a notion of human mind.

THE NAME *ĪTŪTĀ* HAS NO PLURAL

HcH 53:7-13⁹⁷

7

David did not name⁹⁸ Beings⁹⁹ as he¹⁰⁰ has named
(them).

For One alone is the Being; so the name Being
Abrogates the names of Beings which are not
(existing).

For if their names agree, their natures are also the
same.

By itself¹⁰¹ their teaching is proved wrong, my
brothers!

⁹³ See *HcH* 50:14.

⁹⁴ See *HcH* 52: 2.

⁹⁵ See *HcH* 53:5-6.

⁹⁶ See *HcH* 53:1; *HdF* 72:5-7.

⁹⁷ *CSCO* 169 Syr 76, pp.203-204.

⁹⁸ speak of.

⁹⁹ *ītyē*.

¹⁰⁰ Bardaisan.

¹⁰¹ *menneh w-beh*.

8

[illegible]

9

The error did not give a chance to its preachers
To prove and see that, if they are proclaiming Beings
The name of all (beings) is (only one); one alone is
the Being
That is by itself entirely perfect in name and nature.

10

But, my brothers, all things made are the work (of
creation)
And although the name is the same, their natures are
different,
By the will of the Maker; in the case of Beings which
do not have
The necessity of a Creator, now who (both) separated
and made (them) equal,
Separating their natures and making equal their
names?

11

Moses himself bears us witness, for he did not call
another

With the name the Being; they were called ‘gods’,¹⁰²
But not Beings; that through one name He might
teach
The taste of His grace, and through another name He
may make known
The might of His Being, so that they may
acknowledge both.

12

He revealed the name to Moses; for He called
Himself *Ehyeh*¹⁰³
Which is the name of the Being; but never did He call
Another with this name, as it were with His own
names
Calling many; so that through one name which He
allowed
He points out that He alone is the Being and there is
not another.

13

And though all His names are glorious in majesty
And worthy of praise, (it was) this name He allowed
To honour His Being; the Evil one envied His name
And provoked the infidels to give the name Beings;
He hung idols on his name and Beings on his
appellation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See *Ps* 82:6 (= *Jn* 10:34); *HdF* 63:8.

¹⁰³ *Ex* 3:14; *HdF* 47:10, 55:9, 63:6; E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden*, pp.1-4; idem, *Die Theologie*, pp.5-13.

¹⁰⁴ See Beck's note in *CSCO 170 Syr* 77, p.184 n 10.

HcH 54: 4-10¹⁰⁵

4

They have contradicted themselves,¹⁰⁶ for they
exalted one Being
Whose height cannot be searched, and again brought
in
(Other) Beings which cannot be comprehended;
it is clear without any dispute
That (only) one is the nature of Beings, for (only) one
is the name of Beings.
(Only) one is the body¹⁰⁷ of man, for (only) one is the
name of man.

5

Accept without dispute that (only) one is the nature of
Watchers
For (only) one is the name of Watchers; (only) one is
the nature of soul,
For (only) one is the name of soul; genus is called and
explained
With the name of its kind; and if there are differences,
Others which are dissimilar; it is because of the will
of the Creator.

6

He called His servants with His name, ‘gods and lords’,¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *CSCO 169 Syr 76*, pp.205-206. In stanzas 4-6 Ephrem argues against his adversaries using their own logic.

lit. They have tied up and untied.

¹⁰⁷ Ephrem means that the term ‘man’ is equally applicable to all human beings. See Beck’s note in *CSCO 170 Syr 77*, p.185 n 7.

And with the name of His Son He designated the sons
of grace,
And with the name of the Holy Spirit the race of
spiritual (beings).
Their natures are different; but their names are the
same,
So that they may thank His grace, and worship His
lordship.

7

Let them be questioned thus: who called beings
With the name of that Being? If it is He who called
them,
It is entirely a (matter of) grace. But if it was not His
(act),
It is entirely against (Him). But who is greater than
Him,
Plundering His name from Him in order to call the
beings by it?

8

This fabrication of theirs is a word without reality¹⁰⁹
And also a name without *qnōmā*.¹¹⁰ They are (only)
names,
But they are not Beings, so that they bring in the
names
Of Beings instead of them;¹¹¹ for borrowed names
They introduce for contention while their Lord is
(only) one.

¹⁰⁸ *HcH* 53:11; *HdF* 46:12, 62:9, 63:8; see E. Beck, "Die Eucharistie bei Ephraïm", *OC* 38 (1954), p.54.

¹⁰⁹ *qālā d-lā quštā*. Literally it is 'voice without truth'.

¹¹⁰ E. Beck, *CSCO* 170 *Syr* 77, p.186: 'Gegenstand'. See below Appendix.

¹¹¹ That is, beings.

9

Praise be to the Fountain from which proceeded and
went out
The praiseworthy names. But as it was not possible
For His names to be cut off from Him, error prevailed
over freedom

And it stole the names which should have been
worshipped (by it),
So that through them¹¹² the Evil one may hunt down
the worship of the worshippers.¹¹³

10

You are generous,¹¹⁴ my merciful God!
For You have called us ‘gods’; You are a gentle Lord
For You have called us ‘lords’; all who are named by
You
Are exalted through Your appellations¹¹⁵
But they are blamed and exposed –
They who stole Your names, without You.¹¹⁶

After criticizing Bardaisan for composing hymns in imitation of David, Ephrem explains the contrast between both. As regards the concept of God as *Ītyā* (the Being), Bardaisan went wrong, according to Ephrem. The name ‘the Being’ has no plural in Ephrem’s thought, whereas Bardaisan

¹¹² That is, the stolen names.

¹¹³ Worship of stolen names is worship of Satan. See Beck's note in *CSCO 170 Syr 77*, p.186 n 11. Beck's reference to *HcH 53:15* is to be read as *HcH 53:13*.

¹¹⁴ lit. without envy.

¹¹⁵ *b-kunnāyayk*. God's name when called upon us is a *kunnāyā* for us.

¹¹⁶ That is, those who apply divine names to created realities and worship them instead of to the Lord, to whom those names actually belong.

uses the plural. For Ephrem between the Being and beings there is an ontological chasm. According to Ephrem's (Bardaisanite and Neo-Arian) critics, the same name meant the same nature/essence. In that case 'beings' and 'the Being' have the same nature/essence! Thus his critics are defeated with their own views and logic, since not even Bardaisan would argue that the natures of both are the same.¹¹⁷ Still he used the same name 'Beings' to refer to both realities. So Ephrem sees a double folly in his view: Bardaisan identified the name of both without identifying the natures; and thus using the same name for both, the 'critics' can say that they have the same nature as well. Identifying the names (without identifying the natures) or identifying the natures of God and created realities is abhorrent in Ephrem's thought. Here one has to distinguish between Ephrem's own view about borrowing divine names and the critics' use of divine names without any concept of borrowing. If we do not remember this crucial distinction in Ephrem we reach an apparent contradiction in Ephrem's thought: the same name means the same nature.¹¹⁸ For the (Neo-Arian) critics, name is a definition of nature (*kyānā*) and essence. But for Ephrem name is not exactly identical with nature/essence; rather, the idea that name provides an exact definition of nature is abhorrent to Ephrem's thinking. Name expresses some aspect of nature, or the absence of an aspect. As it is clear from *HcH* 48:6, 53:7-9, 54:4-6, Ephrem is not speaking here about

¹¹⁷ It seems that the Bardaisanites and the Neo-Arians held the same concept of names.

¹¹⁸ *HcH* 48: 16; *CNis* 32: 6. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa contend with this view held by Neo-Arians. See M. V. Anastos, "Basil's *KATA EYNOMIOY* ", pp.80-86, 92; T.A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* I, (PMS 8, Cambridge MA. 1979), p. 122; *ibid.*, II, pp.321-322; see also E. Cavalcanti, *Studi Eunomiani*, (OCA 202, Rome 1976).

divine proper names as such. Instead he is speaking about names or terms which we use to explain a 'genus' or 'individual members'. Divine proper names can be applied to human beings provided we keep in mind that the identification of a name does not mean the identification of nature. Divine proper names are proper to the nature of God. These names cannot be taken as 'common' names applicable to a set of individuals who form a 'genus'. The names 'angel', 'man', 'soul', etc are not proper names. They represent the whole class and hence can stand for each and every member. Even among created realities the same name does not necessarily imply the same nature. Divine proper names are applied to human beings, not because of any share or identity in nature, but because of a reflection of the glory and power of the divine proper name. In other words, Moses was called 'god' not because God and Moses formed a genus. When Bardaisan uses the term 'Beings', in Ephrem's opinion it is as if the name 'Being' is a genus applicable to all realities including God; and hence Ephrem's opposition to such a wrong usage of the name 'Being'. In Ephrem's mind it is the same as *Ehyeh*: the unique name of the unique Being is not a 'common name' applicable to any other. If identification of name is identification of nature as the critics (Bardaisanites and Neo-Arians) hold, Ephrem's abhorrence for the term 'Beings' is quite natural; because of his Semitic mind as regards the unique name of God in Ex 3:14, he cannot think of a genus called 'Being'. The Being is unique, without another, without a plural. Burkitt did not appreciate this point when he called Ephrem a 'monist'.¹¹⁹

If the same name cannot be applied to God and created reality in the same sense, how are we to understand

¹¹⁹ *Pr Ref* II, p.cxv.

the interchange of the divine and human names? The critics' view that the same name means the same nature is turned against Bardaisan! When divine names are applied to us do we too have the same nature? The divine nature as such is not shared, though human beings are allowed to put on divine names as well as some reflection of divine glory. Evidently the critics' view about the identification of name and nature/essence comes from a philosophical school of thought¹²⁰ which Ephrem does not share. Borrowing the names does not involve 'identification' of names; nor does borrowing the names mean any borrowing of the actual nature. The names once borrowed are not names as such, but only appellation. The borrowed names are not proper names as far as the applied usage is concerned. Thus a careful reading of Ephrem helps us to avoid an apparent contradiction in Ephrem's theology of divine names.

There is only One Being (One God) worthy of that name because of its nature. When we speak about creatures as beings we should not equate the Creator as a being. Ontologically both are far apart. Here Ephrem does not understand the term Being in a strict philosophical sense. What he opposes is the concept of 'uncreated elements'. The

¹²⁰ See J.de Ghellinck, "Quelques appréciations de la dialectique d'Aristotele dans les conflits trinitaires du IVe siècle", *RHE* 26 (1930), pp.5-42; E. Vandenbussche, "La part de la dialectique dans la théologie d'Eunomius 'le Technologue'", *RHE* 40 (1944 /45), pp.47-72; J. Daniélou, "Eunome l'Arien et l'exégèse néoplatonicienne du Cratyle", *REG* 69 (1956), pp.412-432; E. Mühlenberg, "Die philosophische Bildung Gregors von Nyssa in den Büchern *Contra Eunomium*" *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse*, M. Harl, ed., (Leiden 1971), pp.230-251; J.M.Rist, "Basil's *Neoplatonism*: its background and nature", in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, pp.137-220; in pp.185-190 Rist rejects Daniélou's views.

name 'the Being' is reserved for the Creator. There is nothing which can be called an uncreated being except 'the Being' itself. It is true that Ephrem did not know *Ex* 3:14 according to LXX. But without doubt he knew the sense behind the text of *Ex* 3:14 in LXX from some non-Greek oral or written traditions. The Syriac text transliterates the Hebrew and so Ephrem refers to the divine name *Ehyeh*. But as is clear from *HcH* 53: 11-12, *Ehyeh* is 'the Being' (*Ītūtā*) which has no plural. Ephrem cannot think of a plural (*Ītyē*) because 'there is no other God' in his 'Semitic' mind. The uniqueness of God is expressed in the name *Ehyeh*, which is interpreted as *Ītyā*. This name remains unique in the sense that though all other names of God are 'put on' us, this one is never 'put on' us or any created realities. Every other divine name can become a borrowed name for us; but not this name *Ehyeh*. When Bardaisan uses the term 'Beings' (*Ītyē*) he thinks as a Greek philosopher; but Ephrem does not use the term *Ītyā* in any extra-biblical sense. In *HcH* 53:12 he repeats his thought: 'there is not another' with the name *Ehyeh*; there is no reality which can put on the name the Being. This is the name reserved only for God since He alone is God and there is no other God.¹²¹

The infidels were prompted by the Evil one to apply the unique name of God to created realities. So human beings began to worship created things, idols as if they were God. But such worship is worship of the Evil one and not of God. Human freedom, when inspired by error, applies God's name to creatures. Thus what is not God is called God by idol worshippers and heretics. Those who worship anything other than the only one real God do not worship at all since their

¹²¹ This concept is further explained in *HcH* 2:1-8,13, 49:1-3,6-7, 50:1; see also *HcH* 4:1, 10, 14:7-8, 54 'ōnītā, 5; *HdF* 37:10-14, 47:10; etc.

worship is towards the Evil one. Here too Ephrem is thinking in a strict biblical and monotheistic pattern.

In *HcH* 54:7ff Ephrem comes back to the unique name ‘the Being’. He advises his audience/readers to interrogate the critics: did any of the Scriptures ever call created realities by the unique name of God? If God Himself has called them by some other divine names this is a matter of divine grace. But seeing that the unique name has not been applied to created beings, anyone who uses it to refer to creatures as well as to God, as if there were no distinction, such a person goes against God’s will. Even if some audacious people make use of the unique name to speak of creatures, that usage remains a fabrication; it is only an empty sound when applied to creatures. So the Bardaisanite usage of the term ‘Beings’, as if they represented the plural of the Being, is only a term without reality (*qālā d-lā quštā*), a name without *qnōmā* (*šmā d-lā qnōmā*). What Ephrem denies here is not the reality and *qnōmā* of created beings; created beings do have their reality and *qnōmā*. But created beings do not and cannot have the reality and *qnōmā* of God, even though someone should apply the divine unique name to them.¹²² Here Ephrem is highly subtle and profound in his thought. His position can be summarized as follows:

The Name of God (the Being) has its own reality and *qnōmā*. The name of created reality has its own reality and *qnōmā*. The critics may apply the Name of God to created realities, but the reality and *qnōmā* of God is not thereby transferred to created realities in such a usage. So their usage is only an empty sound, a name without *qnōmā*. Borrowed names do

¹²² The same idea in *HcH* 40:3, 41:1, 43:21; see also *HcH* 27:4; *HdE* 48:5,7.

not mean borrowed 'reality' (*quštā*) and 'borrowed' *qnōmā*. The Lord of the name 'the Being' is the only God. Those who 'steal' the divine names get empty sounds and the real God - the *qnōmā* of God - does not go along with such empty sounds. So when the critics call created things by the name 'Beings' that term has nothing in common with 'the Being' and it is only a meaningless sound as far as Ephrem is concerned. But when God calls us with His other names it is quite another matter, as He is inviting us to share in the glory of His names. God's other names in fact prove to be a 'refuge' for us.¹²³ God did not give an 'empty name' to Moses,¹²⁴ that is to say a name without power.¹²⁵ The idols (which are called and worshipped as gods) are names without content and power. Of course the name idols has its meaning and also content; but as 'gods' they do not have any meaning, power and content associated with the name God (or 'gods' as a borrowed name of some human beings). God's names 'effect' what they stand for; these names are charged with divine might that goes along with them.¹²⁶

In *HcH* 56 Ephrem seems to repeat what he has already explained elsewhere in *HcH*, and the hymn concludes - or may be even introduces - the whole series itself. In this hymn, as well as in the preceding ones, there is a series of citations from Bardaisan - many citations from heretics are not typical of Ephrem's method of refutation. *HcH* 56:1 begins with *šahreh d-bardaišan* (the herd of Bardaisan) the

¹²³ See *HcH* 11:8; *HdE* 27:1.

¹²⁴ *HcH* 4:1.

¹²⁵ See *HcH* 4:10.

¹²⁶ See *HcH* 4:1-6, 4:18.

famous *qālā* (tune)¹²⁷ according to which Ephrem wrote *HdF* 49-65. It is interesting to note that even *HcH* 14 and 53-55 are written to the same tune and this adds to the evidence that originally *HcH* 56 may not have been placed at the end of the hymns in *HcH*. All these may point to the fact that most probably *HcH* 56 was written to introduce a whole series of hymns against the Bardaisanites, and not to conclude a series.

In contrast to ‘the herd of Bardaisan’ and the sect of Mani both of which are only stolen lambs,¹²⁸ Ephrem speaks of the people who put on the ‘beautiful name’ of *Mšīḥa*.¹²⁹ The people belong to God¹³⁰ and God’s name is on God’s people. The heretical sects are designated after the names of their founders; such a situation is called ‘fornication’¹³¹ in the typical OT tradition. The People of God is the Bride of God. The prophets and apostles are only *mākōrē* (suitors) and friends of God’s congregation (*knuštā*).¹³² They do not act or speak in their own ‘names’. Their faithfulness to God and their trustworthiness to God’s congregation depend on their actions and speech in God’s name.¹³³ Thus for Ephrem ‘the name’ which is put on by the congregation as well as by its leaders is the crucial mark of ownership by God.

¹²⁷ Beck argues that here the *qālā* is non-Ephremic and introduced soon after Ephrem. But his argument is less convincing as it takes for granted the present order of the hymn cycle. See E. Beck, “Ephräms des Syriers Hymnik”, *Liturgie und Dichtung. Festschrift für W. Dürig*, H. Becker, R. Kaczynski, ed., (St Ottilien 1983), pp.348-359.

¹²⁸ *HcH* 56:1.

¹²⁹ *HcH* 56:2. In *HcH* 55:5 (*qaddīštā rūḥā* - a rare occurrence in Ephrem), we have a parallel ‘beautiful name’ in that of the Holy Spirit.

¹³⁰ See *Ex* 5:1 which Ephrem alludes to in *HcH* 56:2.

¹³¹ See *HcH* 56: 2-3.

¹³² See *HcH* 56: 1-3.

¹³³ See *HcH* 56:3ff.

Baptism 'in the name of Jesus' provides a distinguishing name, 'Christians' - a name that reveals the identity of their Shepherd 'Christ', a name that shows that they are not 'stolen' by heretics.¹³⁴ In *HcH* 56: 6 Ephrem invites the 'stolen sheep' to come back to the real fold, and to reject 'the name of thieves' and be called after the praiseworthy name of God. Thus the name of Christ which Christians put on is the continuation of the name of Creator towards His possessions (*qenyānāwy*). The relationship of divine love and divine ownership remains.¹³⁵ In order to understand Ephrem's theology of divine names his idea of created realities as God's 'possession' is important.¹³⁶ At baptism 'the names' are written in heaven, in the Book of Life;¹³⁷ the martyrs read their names from that book.¹³⁸ Names are not anything superficial, arbitrary or meaningless. Esau's name 'glutton' points to his action, his way of life; it tells something about his behaviour as well as his nature.¹³⁹ Licentious habits give us a 'bad name' (*šmā bīšā*).¹⁴⁰ After citing Esau's case, Ephrem says that Judas got the 'bad name' 'thief' ¹⁴¹ because of his habit of stealing.¹⁴² But the 'beautiful name' of Jesus beautifies our name, by mixing that name with ours and this provides the exaltation of our low state.¹⁴³ This process is our divinization;¹⁴⁴ it is not becoming God, but reaching God

¹³⁴ See *HcH* 56:5-7.

¹³⁵ See *HcH* 31:1-2 where Ephrem refutes the view of Marcion about an uncaring Stranger God.

¹³⁶ In Ephrem the term *qenyānā* signifies the bond of relation between Creator and the created, Shepherd and his sheep.

¹³⁷ *HdE* 9: *onita*.

¹³⁸ *HdE* 8: 6.

¹³⁹ *HdE* 11: 6.

¹⁴⁰ *HdE* 4: 18; *HdV* 7:1.

¹⁴¹ *Jn* 12:6; *HdF* 80:10.

¹⁴² *HdE* 11:7.

¹⁴³ *HdE* 21:4; *HdF* 12:20; see Beck's note in *CSCO* 155 Syr 74, p.43 n 23.

¹⁴⁴ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp.123-128. For a study of this theme in the Greek Fathers, see P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, N. Russell, trans., (Crestwood 1987); G.I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, L. Sherrard, trans., (Crestwood 1984).

through the incarnate God,¹⁴⁵ who is ‘like His Father’ (*dāmē l-abūhy*).¹⁴⁶ A share and shadow of the divine glory is transmitted through the name. The salvific dimension of Christ’s many names, though He is only one and single (*ḥad hū w-Īḥīdāy*), is related to this theme.¹⁴⁷

One and the same Christ brings to us all kinds of ‘spiritual benefits’ (*‘udrānē*). The many names and appellations of Christ are intermingled with the benefits they carry. Each of these appellations is so called because of the ‘special benefits’ involved and revealed, and also received by us. So Ephrem compares Christ (*Mšīḥā*) and oil (*mešḥā*). The medicinal effects of different kinds of oil extracted from different ‘roots’ - sometimes blended with others - restore health. Different remedies are required for different diseases. Likewise, ‘Christ has become like everyone in everything, while He alone is like His Father.’¹⁴⁸ The name *mešḥā* is only *rāzā* and shadow (*tellālā*) of the name *Mšīḥā*.¹⁴⁹ Here Ephrem is identifying the baptismal oil and Christ whose name is being put on by those who receive baptism. How this ‘mystery’ and ‘shadow’ operates even through those who put on the name of Christ is explained further in:

¹⁴⁵ See *HdE* 21:1-3.

¹⁴⁶ *HcH* 37:7; 43:2 (*dāmē hū l-abūhy*), 5 (*ba-dmūt abūhy*), 6 (*ayk yālōdeh, dāmē l-abūhy*); 56:2 (*dāmē hū l-yālōdeh*); *HdV* 4:6 (*l-abūhy dāmē*); *SdF* 1:26 (*l-haw d-lḥōd dāmē balḥōd*); II:3 (*ayk yālōdeh gmīr yaldā*), etc. These phrases represent Ephrem’s typical answer to the Neo-Arians as well as to those who use unscriptural names like *homoousios*. Son’s ‘likeness’ to His Father is by nature; but our sonship through baptism is by ‘putting on’ His name and not by nature. Basil too was aware of the objections to the term *homoousios* and by 364 he is cautious in his use of this term. See M.V. Anastos, “Basil’s *KATA EYNOMIOY*”, pp.127-129.

¹⁴⁷ *HdV* 4: 5.

¹⁴⁸ *HdV* 4: 6.

¹⁴⁹ *HdV* 4:7-14; see also *HdV* 4-7.

*HdV 4:8*¹⁵⁰

The name oil (*mešḥā*) is indeed the *rāzā* and shadow
of the name *Mšīḥā*
Indeed, the shadow of His name fell on the sick and
they were healed;
Just as, the shadow of Simon fell on the sick and they
were restored (to health).
The shadow of His name, He gave as pledge to His
apostles.
For, their shadows were going to heal.¹⁵¹
Elisha stretched out his body over the boy to heal
him;¹⁵²
But with Simon, (only) his shadow (was enough to
heal).

Mešḥā was used as an external symbol for the inward working of *Mšīḥā*. Christ was depicted inwardly through anointing, and thus it is the name of Christ that works through *oil* and the shadow of Simon. The shadow of Simon is effective because he put on the name *Christian*. Through his shadow it is the name of *Christ*, which had made him a *Christian* that works.¹⁵³ So the name *Mšīḥā* serves as a pledge to the apostles. That name is transmitted to them because of their baptism and hence they are called *Mšīḥāyē*. We observe the following process: the name of Christ is on the apostles as His shadow. So, even the shadows of the apostles become powerful to heal. This healing power is only a reflection of the power that the mere shadow of the apostles

¹⁵⁰ *CSCO 223 Syr 94*, p.15.

¹⁵¹ See *Acts 5:15-16*.

¹⁵² *2Kg 4:34-35*.

¹⁵³ See *HdV 4:7-8*.

receives from the name of Christ. The oil of baptism is associated with the four names of the fourfold rivers of Eden; and the same oil has three names which act as ‘trumpets of baptism’.¹⁵⁴ Here Ephrem is referring to the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These names are ‘trumpets’ because they are pronounced over the newly baptized, who becomes *Christian* by putting on the name of Christ over his name and thereby beautifying his own name. It seems that for Ephrem the three radicals of the term for oil (*mešḥā*) seem to stand for the three names at baptism; at the same time, it stands for the four rivers of Paradise when the final *alaph* is considered as well.¹⁵⁵ At baptism the ‘royal picture’ which was lost by the first Adam is re-depicted.¹⁵⁶ God’s names¹⁵⁷ are associated with divine actions for our salvation, and hence worthy of all our worship.¹⁵⁸ All the types and symbols were transitory and were absorbed in to Christ’s radiance. At His coming types vanished and appellations (*kunnāyē*) stayed behind¹⁵⁹ and the Church worships His ‘varied names’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ *HdV* 4: 14. In *Dem* 7 Aphrahat speaks of ‘sounding the trumpet’ at baptism of those joining the semi-ascetic groups of *bnay qyāmā* and *bnāth qyāmā*. A trumpet-like voice resounded from heaven at Jesus’ baptism. See *Mt* 3:17; *HdF* 46:4, 51:7.

¹⁵⁵ See *HdV* 4:14.

¹⁵⁶ *HdV* 7:5; see P. Bruns, *Das Christusbild*, pp.161-166.

¹⁵⁷ *HdV* 28:13. A nameless God is unthinkable for Ephrem, unlike Philo and Justin. See F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker, *Philo V*, (LCL 275), pp.144-157 (*De Mutatione Nominum II-III*); Justin, *Apologia II*, 6: 1-2. In Ephrem’s view God revealed His proper names and put on our names. God beyond the chasm is beyond theological language.

¹⁵⁸ *HdV* 28:14.

¹⁵⁹ *HdV* 28:4-5, 14:7; see E. Beck, “Symbolum-Mysterium”, p.29.

¹⁶⁰ *HdV* 28:11.

APPENDIX

Ephrem's *Treatise against Bardaisan's 'Of Domnus':* An Apology for his own concept of *names*?

So far we have left out a treatise of Ephrem which speaks about 'names', the so called "*A treatise made by blessed Mar Ephrem against the treatise called 'Of Domnus' written by Bardaisan against Platonists*".¹ Nothing in this treatise shows that Ephrem knew Greek language and Greek philosophy on an academic level. All the same he is familiar with some special Hellenistic notions. From the bilingual and syncretistic culture of Edessa some Greek terms² and ideas could readily be picked up by someone who knew only Syriac. But it is more than probable that most of Ephrem's disciples in Edessa knew both Syriac and Greek and could have helped him to bridge the linguistic barrier. Some very

¹ See H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, pp.163-165.

² Heliodromos, Pyrolampos, Pegasos (*Pr Ref* II, pp.26-27) might have been known to anyone in Edessa. That the words 'sun' and 'eye' are masculine nouns in Greek (*Pr Ref* II, p. xxii) is known to Ephrem. But in a bilingual Edessa where Ephrem wrote this treatise after the composition of *HcH*, this does not constitute evidence that he learnt Greek.

general information about the Greek-Platonic-Stoic world view is all that we can expect to find in this treatise. It is interesting to note that Ephrem defends the Platonists and the Stoics, and even Plato, against Bardaisan's misinterpretation of their ideas!³ Ephrem compares himself to a man who sees a temple or palace on fire; the man is really confused and he runs hither and thither knowing that one is unable to extinguish the fire. Ephrem's frank admission that he is unable to produce convincing arguments, yet he cannot any longer remain silent and hence nonetheless tries to argue against Bardaisan's errors in philosophical matters, is an indication that he is venturing outside his competence.⁴ Evidently Hellenistic philosophy in depth is beyond his competence. Here we shall examine some of his arguments.

'Length' is a 'bare name' (*šmā 'artlāyā*); that is to say it has no *qnōmā*. It exists and it does not exist. It exists in our mind as a notion of physical measurement. But it does not exist because it has no *qnōmā* of its own.⁵ There is nothing that can be called length as such, though the human mind has that notion. The verbs 'sell' or 'buy', and the nouns 'selling'

³ *Pr Ref* II, pp.iii-v, xi, xiii-xiv. Ephrem argues that Bardaisan's *Of Domnus* attributed the views of Stoics to Platonists and he mentions Albinus' (c.A.D.150) book *On the Incorporeal* as the source for Bardaisan. Albinus' authorship of such a work is plausible. See J.Whittaker, "*Parisinus Graecus 1962* and the writings of Albinus", *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, ch 21, p.450 n 2.

⁴ *Pr Ref* II, p.iv.

⁵ *Pr Ref* II, p.viii. In *SdF* IV: 53-60 Ephrem has the same concept, though he uses *šmā-spīqā* instead of *šmā-'artlāyā*. See above Chapter V nn 84, 90.

or ‘buying’, have no *qnōmā*. But the things measured, sold or bought have *qnōmā* and they have three dimensions - space (place), length, breadth.⁶ But *qnōmā* is not identified as ‘body’.⁷ Bodies have *qnōmā*, but *qnōmā* does not necessarily mean a body.

Names and words (and language itself) exist not as *qnōmā* but as signs (*ātwāta*) which our intellect employs in communication about everything.⁸ A horse or an eagle is an example of ‘bony’ *qnōmā* (*qnōmā garmānāya*).⁹ As soon as an artist starts drawing the picture of a lion or horse, a picture is already there in the mind of that artist. If he adds extra limbs an onlooker can detect the folly because horse and lion have a particular bodily *qnōmā* - an external and physical shape that makes it a horse or lion. Mitchell consistently translates *qnōmā* as *substance*. But here *qnōmā* means *proper physical shape* that enables us to detect one bodily *qnōmā* from another bodily *qnōmā*. It is a particular, distinguishing, concrete shape. A ‘line’ (*ṣurtā*) has no *qnōmā* as such since a

⁶ *Pr Ref* II, p.viii.

⁷ *Pr Ref* II, p.viii.

⁸ *Pr Ref* II, p.viii.

⁹ See *Pr Ref* II, p. ix; *Syr Text*, p.19. Mitchell translates this phrase as ‘bodily substances’ and this is what Ephrem means. It is important to note that *qnōmā* need not necessarily be corporeal - an idea that Beck did not notice. Beck is keen to point out Ephrem’s awareness and preference for Stoic ideas here (in a private discussion in July 1989). But the idea of ‘unbony’ *qnōmā* is clear in Ephrem’s mind elsewhere; that is why he here he speaks specifically about ‘bony’ or bodily *qnōmā*. So Ephrem is misinterpreted as speaking of God in bodily terms because of Stoic influence! For a clarification, see G.Noujaim, “Essai sur quelques aspects de la philosophie”, p.28 n 2.

line can be a straight line, a crooked line, or a line forming the shape of a triangle, a quadrangle, etc. Since a ‘line’ has no *qnōmā* it does not exist independently and hence one calls it ‘incorporeal’ (*d-lā gšūm*).¹⁰ By this Ephrem does not mean that every thing that exists and has *qnōmā*, exists as ‘corporeal’, as the Stoics might argue. Here Ephrem is concerned only with ‘bony’ (bodily) *qnōmā*. A line can take any shape, whereas a horse or lion has already a special shape. Only our mind can give a proper shape to the line we are going to draw. Visible things imprint a proper shape in our mind; if we see angels we see them with a shape and that image is in our mind. But minute creatures are invisible to naked eyes and hence our mind cannot form a picture of them.¹¹ Thus some kind of visibility is corresponding to comprehensibility.

Ephrem mentions three kinds of *incorporeals* (*names*): *joined names* (*šmāhē ’asīrē*) which are given to bodies and *qnōmē*;¹² *names* which are given to notions (*sukkālē*), like space and time and number; and *words* (*melle*) which are used with reference to anything. Then he asks: “And while these three classes are incorporeal, they have nevertheless called these seven names only *incorporeal*. And why, only these names? For (names like) ‘gold’ or ‘silver’, are also names that are incorporeal. But because they have been given to bodies and *qnōmē*, they are also corporeal

¹⁰ *Pr Ref* II, p.ix.

¹¹ *Pr Ref* II, pp.ix-x.

¹² *gušmē w-qnōmē*. Both are not identified as Beck thinks.

names (*šmāhē gšīmē*). When therefore you hear a name which someone utters or calls out ‘gold’ or ‘silver’, or ‘eagle’, or ‘earth’, at the very mention of the name your imagination fixes itself on the corporeal *qnōmā* (*qnōmā gšīmā*),¹³ and you know whether it is soft or hard, bitter or sweet, and so also when someone speaks to you about colours. But if, he utters to you ‘time’ or ‘number’ your mind does not settle down on bodies or *qnōmē*. For what *qnōmā* is there for time, or what body is there for number or space? You do not know whether they are black or white, whether they are soft or hard”.¹⁴

One has to keep in mind that Ephrem is defending Platonists and Stoics and ‘Greek’ philosophers in general against Bardaisan and hence not expressing his own views on these topics.¹⁵ Appellations are necessary for expressing notions (*sukkālē*). We cannot describe anything in writing without the help of appellations.¹⁶ Another concept which Ephrem defends is *epiphaneia* calling it *galyūtā*.¹⁷ But there is no reason to believe that Ephrem’s concepts of *kasyātā* and *galyātā* are in any way dependant on Greek *epiphaneia*. But I

¹³ *qnōmā gšīmā* is the same as *qnōmā garmānāyā* which we have already met. This is not the only kind of *qnōmā*.

¹⁴ *Pr Ref II*, Syr text, pp.22-23; Mitchell's translation is not clear.

¹⁵ See *Pr Ref II*, pp.xi-xii, xiv.

¹⁶ See *Pr Ref II*, p.xiv.

¹⁷ See *Pr Ref II*, p.xiv; Syr Text, p.31. Mitchell points out a parallel in Aristotle’s *Metaphysica* vi.2,2. But see J. Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation II*, (Princeton repr.1985), p.1624, 16-17 (Book vii (z), 2). Indeed it is not Aristotle’s own opinion. He refers to “some” who hold this view!

admit that I have to do further research on this particular topic and I do not rule out a correspondence of ideas here. Ephrem seems to have had a special reason behind the composition of *Against Bardaisan's Domnus*, as we read towards the end of the treatise: "But so Bardaisan juggled even with names and supposed that the nature (of things) is like their names".¹⁸ This view is attributed to the followers of Bardaisan in *HcH* 53:7-13 and 54:4-10 which we saw already. 'As the name, so the nature' is a view Ephrem contends against here too. 'As the name, so the essence' was also the view of Neo-Arians.

It is probable that Ephrem's own views on 'names' were interpreted in this way by the critics. He seems to be eager to demonstrate that the views of 'philosophers' are not the same as their Bardaisanite misinterpretations. So we hear from Ephrem: "But the Philosopher of the Syrians (Bardaisan) made himself a laughing-stock among the

¹⁸ *Pr Ref* II, pp. xxi-xxii; Syr Text, pp.48-49; *tap* literally means 'to float', 'swim', 'set sail for', etc. Ephrem does not like the casual and superfluous approach of Bardaisan(ites) in making use of Greek ideas, which he himself is not competent to explain; but still he can point out some mistakes. As far as Ephrem is concerned, Neo-Arians and Bardaisanites hold that name is an exact definition of nature/essence, and both sects depend on the theory of names as taught by some Greek 'schools'. See above Chapter VI n 120. According to Kopecek the Neo-Arian theory of language is derived from Albinus and Middle Platonism. See T.A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* II, pp.321-334. Ephrem's mention of Albinus in his *Pr Ref* is significant, though *Pr Ref* is directed against Bardaisanites in general. Possekel's work does not produce concrete textual evidence on the problem of Greek philosophical influence on Ephrem though her arguments are plausible. See U. Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts*, passim.

Syrians and Greeks, not only in that he was unable to state but also in that he did not really know the teaching of Plato; and in (his) simplicity he hastened to calumniate Plato by (ascribing to him) the inquiries of others, though Plato had a great struggle against these (very) inquiries, which Bardaisan thinks belong to Plato. But these inquiries (were conducted) according as the Stoics invented names for things, and because they (were expressed) as in parables”.¹⁹ The mistake of Bardaisan as regards understanding the Stoic concept of notions and names is pointed out.²⁰ “And it is not right that the Greeks should be blamed for the appellations which they bestowed. For these appellations were not invented with a view to judgement and discussion, but for the notion of why it was so.”²¹ Ephrem concludes the treatise with some linguistic arguments to show that name does not necessarily mean an exact definition of nature.

The *Pr Ref* were not written for an ordinary readership or audience.²² El-Khoury and Kronholm think that *HcH* were written in the Nisibene period,²³ apparently following Beck.²⁴ But Drijvers is not certain as he writes referring to Rücker:²⁵ “The Hymns contra Haereses are probably of

¹⁹ *Pr Ref* II, pp.iii-iv.

²⁰ See *Pr Ref* II, p. xiii.

²¹ *Pr Ref* II, p. xiv.

²² See H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, pp.128-129; for a comparative study between *Pr Ref* and *HcH*, see pp.130-165.

²³ N. El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation*, p.155; T. Kronholm, *Motifs*, p.20.

²⁴ E. Beck, “Ephraem Syrus”, *RAC* 5, pp.521-522.

²⁵ A. Rücker, *Des heiligen Ephräms des Syrers Hymnen gegen die Irrlehren*, p. xxiv.

earlier date than the Prose Refutations”.²⁶ According to McVey some of the hymns in *HcH* must be from the Edessan period.²⁷ The bulk of *HcH* were written for an ordinary audience whether in Nisibis or in Edessa; but some of the hymns in *HcH* were definitely composed in Edessa. The *Pr Ref* were composed in Edessa for teaching in ‘school’; ‘the students’ were an elite and that may be the reason why Ephrem points out the special mistakes and drawbacks of Bardaisan’s *Of Domnus*, as they themselves were linguistically better equipped than Ephrem as regards the Greek philosophical world.

It is also probable that Ephrem had not only his ‘school’ in mind when he wrote the work. But he seems to have had some apologetic purpose behind the composition of *Against Bardaisan’s Domnus*. One clear idea that stands out throughout the work is the use of names among the Greeks in general, in order to counter the claims of Bardaisanites. There is nothing that can be shown as convincing proof that Ephrem ever had directly come across the theory of names among Greeks. Even in this treatise (one of his last?) his knowledge of such Greek views is very fragmentary and this is used to show that the Bardaisan(ites) ‘floated’ with ‘names’ identifying them with ‘nature’. The Bardaisanites were influenced by various Greek ideas of names and this

²⁶ H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, p.129.

²⁷ K.E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, pp.11 n 30, 27 n 110. Beck’s view in *RAC* seems to have escaped McVey’s notice.

lack of Greek philosophical roots in Ephrem's idea of names is remarkable; and it points to the fact that, though Ephrem had some indirect contact with Greek ideas of names in Edessa when he wrote *Pr Ref*, his own views on names are from his pre-Edessan period, though he gave a full exposition to them only in his Edessan period. At least *SdF*, which were written towards the end of the Nisibene period, are the witness for this. His lack of interest in and ignorance about, an extra-biblical view on names is conspicuous.

In none of the texts we have examined do we see any special Neo-Platonic or Stoic theory of names; in the *Treatise against Bardaisan's Of Domnus*, Ephrem is saying that even with the help of Greek philosophy Bardaisanites cannot reject what he wrote about divine names and titles. That is why one can envisage the time of composition of this work only after *SdF*, *HdF*, *HcH* and all other works where Ephrem deals with names. Probably Ephrem's idea of divine names was interpreted by the Bardaisanites to suit their views and this prompted him to correct them for his own 'students'. Having written so much about divine names it was only natural that at least someone could mistakenly suppose that for Ephrem name defines nature or name and nature are the same - an idea which Ephrem noticed among Neo-Arians and Bardaisanites themselves when he wrote *HcH*. Ephrem's own theology of divine names and appellations was aimed mainly against Neo-Arians, while it seems that some Edessan Bardaisanites also conducted their arguments using Neo-

Platonic and Stoic ideas of names. On the other hand the Neo-Arians too had absolutely identified name and ‘essence’,²⁸ though here Ephrem’s argument is levelled against Bardaisanites of Edessa. This raises the prospect that Edessan Bardaisanites and Neo-Arians had something in common: name ‘defines’ nature, ‘essence’; knowing the ‘name’ is grasping the ultimate ‘essence’. For Ephrem this is, as we have seen, an abhorrent view.

²⁸ See L.R. Wickham, “Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean”, pp.537-540, 544-568; R.P. Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, pp.49, 55-57; see above Chapter VI nn 118, 120.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the first part of this study we saw how and why Ephrem introduces a rationale of his own in order to create a theological language of his own. He was not happy with the scrutinizing approach of the Arians. Was his questioning the reasonableness and validity of not distinguishing between thinking/knowing/speaking about Creator and the created by placing them on equal terms, just a late reaction to Arianism, an afterthought in Ephrem's Edessan period? Or was it a natural and inner evolution of Ephrem's own way of doing theology? The latter seems to be the case, though Late-Arianism and especially Neo-Arianism and various other heretical sects gave an occasion and immediate background. Ephrem based himself firmly on imagery drawn from the Nature and Scripture. He got the concept of the ontological chasm from biblical images; but he was aware of a similar concept in popular religious mythologies.

Ephrem ruled out a defining approach and opted for a poetic approach in theology. For him theological language is poetic, iconic and analogical. Never forgetting the ontological chasm became the corner stone of his methodology in

God-talk. Our language about God uses ordinary words with the nuance added to those words by a self-revealing God whose sign posts names and epithets are set up in Nature or revealed to us in Scripture. These names and appellations are *rāzē* and *galyātā* with the help of which a balanced theological language is made possible. We can speak about what we know, but never pretending to know what we do not know. This means speaking about *galyātā*, but confessing our ignorance about *kasyātā*. There is an ultimate boundary for our investigation, knowledge and speech, when we set out as created rational beings. What is left unspoken is more than our speech can take hold of. The element of mystery is not exhausted by speech, and hence the role of respectful silence is only a demand of intellectual honesty as far as Ephrem is concerned.¹

In the second part, we explored how Ephrem constructs his theology of divine names: all divine proper names are revealed and put on us. But one of these, *Ītūtā*, is only revealed, but not put on us. Divine appellations are in fact whatever human terms God put on Himself. Ephrem does not (*qua* human being) start thinking about a God first, and then apply human language to that God. For him the movement is from the part of God: He puts on our language, on Himself. Revelation is an initiative of God, because we are His

¹ One of the greatest philosophers of our century wrote something similar summing up his first and only philosophical work he published during his lifetime. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (London 1961, repr. 1989), p.3: “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence”. Wittgenstein repeats the same dictum at the end of his book; *ibid.*, p.74.

qenyānā and not His *Ītūtā*. He became manifest, incarnate in human language in order to put His names on us. But the proper climax of incarnation into our realm is when the Son put on humanity. Thus divine proper names became our appellations; our proper names became His appellations. This exchange of divine-human names does not involve a change in the ontological or natural level on both sides.

Ephrem does not think of a self-hiding God whom the creatures are able to track down. Nor it is an unknown God who is revealed to a selected few. If He had remained completely hidden our intellect would never have been able to think about a God at all. Through creation, revelation in Scripture and incarnation into humanity, God crossed over to our side. Any other God except this self-revealing God is a fabrication of the human mind and Ephrem is unable to accept such a created god. But the self-revealing God is not fully in our grasp, as He is *Ītūtā*. Hence we cannot speak of the revealed God as if He was not revealed, but instead reached by our search among fellow-creatures. We know our created world with the help of our created faculties. All our created faculties help us and are at work when we speak about the revealed God. But the eyes - physical and intellectual - with their created range cannot conquer the Creator. The eyes see the sign posts and *rāzē* in Nature; the ears - physical and intellectual - hear the names and titles of God in Scripture. Thus Nature and Scripture are mirrors of divine self-revelation. In Nature mirror, reflection and reality stand apart; in Scripture they are closer; in the Incarnate Son these three are identified. Nature is the icon and sacrament of the Creator, for the eyes to see; Scripture explains the Creator

in words for the ears. In the incarnate Son icon and language gives way to reality. Looking at the icon, listening to the names, Ephrem is caught up in wonder, awe, praise and silence.

Ephrem's theology of divine names was developed in a particular theological context: his polemics against Late-Arianism in general and Neo-Arianism in particular. But he employed his views on names also against other groups like the Marcionites, Bardaisanites and Manichaeans. Scrutinizing the divine realities implies neglecting the ontological chasm. Describing God as if we would talk about fellow-creatures is an abhorrent and unrealistic approach against which Ephrem contends.

Can we know God at all? Ephrem would say: Yes, but not on our terms. If we can know God in the way we know creatures that one is no God for Ephrem. So our knowledge of God is not the kind of knowledge we have about the created realities. More than a century later, we will find the same concept with some Platonic ramifications in Severus of Antioch,² in Philoxenus of Mabbug³ whose epistemological distinction in particular, is closer to Ephrem's views,⁴ and in Jacob of Serugh (though putting reason against faith),⁵ to mention only a few theologians from the West Syriac

² R.C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch. Philoxenus of Mabbug. and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford 1976), p.34-44. Severus deals with this theme in the light of certain Platonic elaborations.

³ *Ibid*, pp.102-112.

⁴ E. Beck, "Philoxenos und Ephräm", *OC* 46 (1962), pp.61-76.

⁵ R.C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, pp.140-141.

tradition. But Jacob of Serugh is following Ephrem when he exploits the imagery of the ontological chasm, but with more mythological allusions.⁶ In the East Syriac tradition from Narsai (399-502) to Abdiš'o of Nisibis (+1318) we find traces of Ephrem's legacy.

Our knowledge about God involves basically accepting God on His own terms, following the divine pedagogy, which implies the full use of all our faculties. The divine self-revelation is reflected in and through the mirrors Nature and Scripture. There are three progressive steps or stages in the process of divine self-revelation which points out a theology of revelation comprising redemption and divinization.

(1) God creates: the created universe is an icon or sacrament that points to the Creator. Since they are only the *qenyānā*, and God is *Ītūtā*, there is an ontological chasm between both. But everything in the created world serves as a pointer to God who is both on our side of the chasm (as He revealed Himself) and beyond the chasm (as He alone knows Him as Himself). What is in Nature is for the eye to see, and the eye of our mind interprets the sign-posts in order to help us to journey towards God.

(2) God speaks: what He spoke indirectly through the prophets and apostles, and directly through His Son form a royal highway for our travel. The Scripture is for the ears to

⁶ *Ibid*, pp.113-118.

hear; physical hearing demands further hearing on a deeper level. In the mirror of Scripture God is incarnate through our mode of speech. What he adopted from our side of the chasm must not be confused with the revelation of His proper names. When He put on our language it is only an accommodation or adaptation. These are only our names which He put on as titles, not only to teach but also to save us. By putting His names on us He elevates us; yet we do not cease to be creatures; nor does He cease to be what He is.

(3) God puts on humanity: the divine reflection in types and symbols in the mirror of the created universe was followed by the incarnation of God in human language, and ultimately the incarnation as a human being.

In Nature we see *rāzē* as in a mirror; in Scripture we hear the names, titles and words, as from behind the mirror. The incarnate Son is the climax of the process of divine self-revelation, the focal point of the unfolding of our salvation and the Key to our knowledge about God. Nothing created will ever be able to cross the ontological chasm and this rules-out any ‘natural’ knowledge about God. If God, having created everything, had left no trace about Himself in symbols and ‘signs’, or if He had decided not to reveal Himself at all, there would be no awareness about God on our part. But He depicted *kasyātā* upon *galyātā*: symbols in Nature, names and titles in Scripture. Human intelligence is taken for granted in order to ‘see’ (not just physically) these signposts and ‘hear’ the ‘speech’. Without ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ there is no valid God-talk.

I have not come across any inner inconsistency in Ephrem's thought as regards the ontological chasm and divine names. He has a logic and language of his own in doing theology. But basically there is no worked-out system or even a precise presentation of all that he thinks. This calls for a careful study of his way of thinking and also the way he elaborates what he thinks. Often there is much repetition; but in many other cases he gives only glimpses, taking for granted various details. No poet is supposed to write with the precision and clarity of prose. This makes him one of the most difficult patristic theologians. If he repeats, it is for the ordinary illiterate believers; if he takes for granted, it is for the intellectuals: the school, heretic propagandists and the élite. Thus he seems to have had two kinds of audience or readers in mind. If we separate the poet from the theologian, the pastor from the disputant, we may miss the real Ephrem. His naturally rich poetic imagination defies systematization, apparently concealing his disgust for a kind of logic that neglects the ontological chasm.

All the available authentic works of Ephrem dealing with the theology of divine names are written between c.355 and 373. This again leads us to conclude that it was Ephrem's reaction and response to later Arian propagandists and Neo-Arians. There is no evidence to show that he studied the Arian views in great depth with a view to refuting them. But he does not misrepresent their views deliberately. He knew their views in general; most probably his source of information was not any particular book or Arian author, but the propagandists who confused ordinary folk with subtle arguments and disputes. As a result Ephrem's own counter

arguments are not the result of any academic interest. He was often responding to the problem from a pastoral point of view; but in the 'school' (both of Nisibis and Edessa) he had a more élite audience. His legacy out-lived him in Edessa to win over the Arians and other heretics.

Patristic scholars writing on Arianism and Neo-Arianism have consistently avoided according even a footnote to the anti-Arian legacy of Ephrem.⁷ But some four decades ago Dom Beck had pointed out Ephrem's views reacting against the Arian crisis. Recently Bruns has attempted to draw more attention to this. Both Cavalcanti and Kopecek, in their excellent studies on Neo-Arianism, deal with the problem as it was confronted mainly by the three Cappadocians. But a problem remains: how to account for the parallel perspectives in Ephrem and the Cappadocian Fathers as regards Neo-Arianism? The Cappadocians blended traditional Christian teachings with Greek philosophical

⁷ M. Simonetti, *Studi sull' Arianesimo*; idem, *La Crisi Ariana nel IV secolo*; R.C. Gregg, D.E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, (London 1981); R.C. Gregg, ed., *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments*, (Cambridge, Mass. 1985); R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, (London 1987); R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381*, (Edinburgh 1988). Patristic scholars have to consider the Syriac world to complement the Greek and Latin Patristics. Otherwise Christian theology will be on the Western – Greek and Latin versions only. Original Eastern version of Christianity is Syriac – a mixture of Biblical, Aramaic, and Hellenistic synthesis. Quasten provides a typical model of this Western (Greek and Latin) attitude to the patristic world, when he writes about Gregory of Nazianzus: "He is the only poet among the great theologians of the fourth century." (J. Quasten, *Patrology III*, p.239). Quasten's manual has totally neglected the Syriac Patrology and hence this lop-sided view of patristic poetry and theology.

views to combat heresies. Ephrem based himself on the former with a great emphasis on Scripture and hence the difference. I do not suggest any possibility of contact or borrowing on any side. But the parallels call for a reappraisal of the Neo-Arians in the light of Ephrem's polemics, especially because of the chronological precedence of Ephrem over the Cappadocians. Gregory of Nyssa wrote his *Contra Eunomium* between c.380-383; Gregory of Nazianzus wrote his orations between 379 and 381. It is only natural that both of them were influenced by what Basil wrote (c.364)⁸ in *Adversus Eunomium* - almost contemporaneous with Ephrem's works we have discussed. It is not even theoretically possible that Ephrem composed all those books only after Basil composed his response to Eunomius.

This creates even more problems: how far and wide into the East did the disputes by Aetius and Eunomius reach before the publication of Aetius' *Syntagmation*, Eunomius' *Apology* and Basil's *Adversus Eunomium*? Aetius is a *Syrian* in Basil's words, since he came from Coele-Syria.⁹ It is generally suggested that Eunomius wrote his *Apology* c.361. Why it was called *Apology* is disputed by the Cappadocians who are evidently unwilling to concede such a title.¹⁰ Was not Eunomius the master dialectician clarifying and defending the already propagated views of his teacher Aetius? The oral propaganda of Neo-Arianism had been going on for more

⁸ See M.V. Anastos, "Basil's *KATA EYNOMIOY*", pp.67-136; P.J. Fedwick, "A chronology of the life and works of Basil of Caesarea", in idem, ed., *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, p.10 n 57.

⁹ Basil, *Adversus Eunomium* I.i (PG 29.500).

¹⁰ M.V. Anastos, "Basil's *KATA EYNOMIOY*", p.26.

than a decade before Eunomius' written *Apology*. Aetius' crypto-syllogistic theses forming his work *Syntagmation*¹¹ were suited for oral propaganda and disputes. These semi-syllogistic sayings were only the written-down version of oral propaganda of the early 350s; they appeared in written form in 359. During this period Ephrem composed his *SdF*, a few years before Eunomius composed the *Apology* and Basil wrote *Adversus Eunomium*. Hence it would be quite reasonable to suppose that Ephrem began to confront the Late-Arian and Neo-Arian views during the last decade of his Nisibean period. *SdF* is a metrical homily written almost the same period as - if not a few years earlier than - Aetius published his *Syntagmation*, in response to the oral propaganda of Late-Arian and emerging Neo-Arian groups.

In *HcH* Ephrem mentions Arians who went again after error, *Aetians* noted for their hair-splitting dialectics, *Paulinians*, *Sabellians* and *Photinians* (*HcH* 22:4); *Aetians*, *Arians*, *Sabellians* and *Photinians* with a reference to Nicean Council (*HcH* 22:20). Who these *Paulinians* are, is not clear; but there are only two possibilities: either those who held on to the views of Paul of Samosata (which is unlikely), or the supporters of Paulinus of Tyre.¹² The sect of *Photinians*¹³ flourished in 340s and 350s, but how far they spread in the East is not clear. Arians find mention in *HcH* 24:12.16 and Arius in *HcH* 24:19.21.

¹¹ L.R. Wickham, "The *Syntagmation* of Aetius the Anomean", *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968), pp. 532-569; idem, "The date of Eunomius' *Apology*: a reconstruction", *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969), pp.231-240.

¹² R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.30, 32, 44-45, 277f, 599f; etc.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp.235-238; M. Simonetti, *La crisi ariana*, pp.202-206.

Even if all the hymns in *HdF* and *HcH* were composed between 363/4-373 the thematic relationship between *SdF* and *HdF*, and *HcH* and *Pr Ref* cannot be overlooked. The arrangement of Ephrem's hymns into cycles does not necessarily give any clue as to whether they were all composed over a short period or not. There is very little thematic development as regards his concepts of the ontological chasm and divine names. This need not specifically indicate a shorter period: because a comparison of the concept of the ontological chasm in *HdP*, *CNis*, *HdF*, *LP* and *Pr Ref* does not also show any significant thematic development. *HdP* is one his earliest surviving works, but *Pr Ref* one of the - if not the - latest composition. Moreover, Ephrem's views about God as *Ītūtā*, creatures as *qenyānā*, *galyātā* as vehicles of *kasyātā* do not represent a change or development.

As a poet-theologian Ephrem often appears not to be tied at any particular period or socio-cultural milieu. This is because he did not base his theological deliberations on any particular system of philosophy, and because he did not write to fashion a well-thought out system of his own. It is precisely his unsystematic and poetic imagery that makes him an original theologian during the patristic period or even later. As a poet and theologian Ephrem stands out and any effort to separate the poet from the theologian would result in dragging him out of his proper context. Ephrem's legacy is better understood in the context of his own works rather than in the shade of the popularity accorded to him by successive generations: as a theologian he lived in the fourth century; as a poet he is not confined to his own time, place and culture;

as he did his theology mainly in poetry with the help of imagery drawn from Nature and Scripture rather than from speculative and systematic philosophy, the iconic or sacramental character of Nature and Scriptural language make him speak beyond his time, place and culture. This is quite natural for two reasons: in every time and place there is an interest in God-talk, and those theological systems which are based too much on any particular culture or school of thought of a particular time and place will crumble sooner or later. Secondly, Nature where we live and Scripture we believe in have a dynamic way of communicating with every generation without ever exhausting their underlying iconic and sacramental character.

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About this Book

This present volume may well be the first monograph of Ephrem's theology in the English language. And the author has focused on a very important aspect: divinization or *theosis* as the goal envisaged in the process of divine revelation and incarnation. The theology of names is basic to Ephrem's thought and is very much part of his *theosis*. The self-revelation of God is complete only in the divinization of humanity, or theosis. One finds here a close study of over fifty hymns of Ephrem, several of which are entirely dedicated to his theory of names. Koonammakkal basically considers Ephrem's use of 'ontological chasm' and his theology of names. It is a revelation by means of our speech, rather than a case of God's language being given to us. Divine names are *galyâtâ* and the underlying natures, *kasyâtâ*. One of the final chapters of this work discusses the relation of divine names to baptism which further indicates how Ephrem's theories are not esoteric but orthodox and grounded in an ecclesial experience. The Church through the sacraments is the means of sanctification. Koonammakkal considers his own work to be just the beginning. Building on this fine foundation one might hope that the rabbinic traditions which surrounded Ephrem might be carefully scrutinized. In the end it may be said that such was Ephrem's genius, that he defied any systematization in developing his theory of names and transcended all influence. By bringing together the anthropomorphic language of the OT and the human experiences of Jesus, Ephrem seems to allude to the idea of the bodily incarnation of God as the continuation and culmination of God's incarnation into human language. And here Koonammakkal mentions the research of J. Neusner. This stunning conclusion merits further research even in regard to Ephrem. This present research of Koonammakkal really goes to the heart of *theosis* and what it actually means. This will have an enriching impact on the study of *theosis* in these other Syriac writers as well, giving as it were the biblical foundation. The iconic or sacramental character of Ephrem's language about Nature and Scripture allow him to speak beyond his time, place and culture. It puts divine names on a biblical foundation. For those involved in inter-religious dialogue, a better perspective on the discussion of *advaita* in Hinduism will be possible as a result of this research.

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